

Elementary Literacy

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*Please visit the Resource Exchange on TFANet to access the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit**, which contains sample tools we've collected over time that are referenced throughout this text. You can also access many other tools on the Resource Exchange—from a wide range of grade levels and subject areas—which have been developed and shared by our corps members and alumni.*

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Related Reading

“Put Reading First”

National Institute for Literacy

1

“The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3”

by *Betty Hart and Todd Risley*

The above article can be accessed online at American Educator using this link:

<http://www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/issues.cfm> (select **Spring 2003** issue)

The Fundamental Importance of Literacy

Introduction

- I. Literacy as Gateway
- II. The Stark Reality: Literacy and the Achievement Gap
- III. Why We Have a Literacy Course
- IV. The Balanced Literacy Approach: Some History
- V. A Closer Look at Balanced Literacy Instruction
- VI. Preview of the Literacy Text

Reading is the fundamental skill upon which all formal education depends. Research now shows that a child who doesn't learn the reading basics early is unlikely to learn them at all. Any child who doesn't learn to read early and well will not easily master other skills and knowledge, and is unlikely to ever flourish in school or in life.¹

I. Literacy as Gateway

As Teach For America corps members, alumni, and staff, we are unified by our conviction that all children should have an equal opportunity in life. For those of us teaching elementary students, one could argue that our greatest opportunity to alter our students' life prospects comes through teaching them to read, write, and communicate effectively. No single method of intervention will have as dramatic an effect on a student's future learning and success than a solid foundation in literacy. Quite literally, a child's reading and writing skills are portals to, and catalysts for, whole worlds of learning.

If this seems like an obvious point, it may only be because so many of us have been fortunate enough to take our own literacy for granted. Research on the benefits of literacy ability (and on the tragedy of a lack thereof) provides a stark reminder that one's mastery of literacy is inextricably tied to success in all other academic areas. For example, children who read well in the early grades are far more successful in later school years. Research has demonstrated that vocabulary size at the end of first grade predicts reading comprehension ten years later with striking accuracy.² Young, capable readers will seize the opportunities provided in a literacy-infused classroom and develop invaluable confidence in their own abilities, which leads directly to success in other subjects such as social studies, math, and science.

The corollary to that finding is the disturbing truth that even a relatively small gap in a child's literacy development can have devastating, long-term consequences. Research conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has found that more than 74% of children who enter first grade at risk for reading failure will continue to struggle to read into adulthood.³ Weak literacy skills will prohibit these children from accessing entire fields of knowledge, often resulting in failure to complete school and in a lifetime of diminished opportunities. The Children's Literacy Initiative drives home this point: "Americans are faced with disheartening statistics: 85 percent of the juveniles who

¹ Moats, Louisa. "Teaching Reading IS Rocket Science: What Expert Teachers of Reading Should Know and Be Able to Do." American Federation of Teachers, June 1999. Online at <http://www.aft.org>.

² Biemiller, Andrew. Teaching Vocabulary in the Primary Grades: Vocabulary Instruction Needed. In J.F. Baumann & E.J. Kame'enui (Eds.), *Vocabulary Instruction: Research to Practice* (pp. 28-40). New York: Guilford.

³ <http://www.educationnews.org>.

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appear in court and 75 percent of unemployed adults are illiterate."⁴ Clearly, the risks that face children who cannot read proficiently are incredibly and unacceptably high.

II. The Stark Reality: Literacy and the Achievement Gap

It is disturbing, but perhaps not surprising, that the literacy skills of students in the under-resourced schools where we teach often lag well behind those of children in wealthier areas. Thus, literacy is not only one of the key levers for overcoming the achievement and opportunity gap that plagues the nation's most under-resourced schools, but the *absence* of literacy skills is one of the key indicators of the achievement gap in the first place. As former Secretary of Education Rod Paige made clear: "Children who do not learn to read early on are at risk of being left behind. And yet, seven out of ten inner-city fourth graders can't read proficiently. This is unacceptable—our children deserve better, and we will change this."⁵

Keeping in mind that "basic level" as a standard of reading achievement is truly a low bar, consider the following facts, drawn from the United States Department of Education:⁶

- Approximately 40 percent of students across the nation cannot read at a basic level.
- Almost 70 percent of low-income fourth grade students cannot read at a basic level.

Similarly, the National Assessment of Educational Progress surveys in 1998 found discrepancies in writing skills of students by socio-economic status.⁷

Simply considering statistics that describe the enormous number of our students who struggle to read cannot prepare us for the reality of teaching those students in our classrooms. Katie Jaron (Houston '02) remembers how shocked she was upon discovering the lagging literacy skills of her fourth graders:

Before I began teaching, I had read and studied what seemed like a thousand statistics on the gap in literacy skills I knew I would encounter in my classroom. But my first week of teaching fourth grade, when I discovered that most of my students were clustered around a mid first grade or early second grade level in their reading fluency and comprehension, made all of those statistics real to me in a truly startling way. In the first week of school, I watched my students struggle to read and spell basic sight words. I watched them stumble through easy reading passages only to have absolutely no recollection of the text's meaning. It's one thing to read a statistic about a certain percentage of children performing below a basic level; it's another thing entirely to observe a ten year old who can only read 40 words per minute at the beginning of fourth grade, when he should be reading over 100. The moment I realized how alarmingly far behind my students were in their literacy skills was also the moment I realized that moving their reading and writing forward in dramatic ways was the most important and enormous charge I could ever have.

⁴ Adams, Marilyn Jager. *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.

⁵ Paige, Rod. Upon presenting \$500,000 grant to the National Urban League, October 11, 2002.

<http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2002/10/10112002.html>, accessed 7/1/2010.

⁶ National Association of Educational Progress. "Nation's Report Card: Reading 2002." Available online at

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2003521>, accessed 7/1/2010.

⁷ National Center for Education Statistics. "Nation's Report Card," 1998. Website

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.

Research has shown that 95% of children have the ability to learn to read in a predictable way.⁸ The remaining five percent have specific reading or cognitive disabilities and delays that make learning to read exceptionally challenging. Given these statistics, why is Katie's first-week experience all too common among teachers of low-income students? What accounts for the 70% of low-income fourth graders who have **not** acquired literacy skills in the expected manner? The association between poor reading outcomes and poverty or minority status no doubt reflects the accumulated effects of several risk factors, including lack of access to literacy-stimulating preschool experiences and to excellent, coherent reading instruction in the early elementary grades.

The raw difference in the number of words that, on average, poorer children encounter is also a factor. A landmark study conducted at the University of Kansas examined the exposure to verbal language of children in several socio-economic settings and found a dramatic difference in the total number of words heard by children at the high end of the socio-economic scale (45 million words over four years) and the children in the lowest sector of the socio-economic scale (13 million). All children will show up for Kindergarten on the same day, but one may have heard 32 million fewer words in his or her lifetime, a fact that will almost certainly affect how quickly a child can decode and understand words.⁹ Clearly, environmental factors—including those at play before children ever arrive at school—have an enormous impact on students' literacy development.

The multiple reasons for this gap do not change our responsibility to work to close it. But the language and literacy gap that exists, even amongst our Kindergarteners, has dramatic implications for *what* we do in the classroom and *how* we prepare ourselves to do it.

III. Why We Have a Literacy Course

We put special emphasis on teaching literacy at the summer institutes for two primary reasons. First, it is absolutely clear that teaching our students to read and write proficiently is critical to our ability to lead students to significant academic gains. By dramatically increasing our students' literacy levels, we put them on the path toward a better future. Second, teaching children to read and write is incredibly difficult. It is **not a process that we can design** simply by relying on our own education or advanced literacy skills. Our own love of and enthusiasm for books and reading will not be enough to create independent readers and writers either. **There is a science to teaching children to decode words and read independently, and as elementary teachers, it is our responsibility to learn it.** The reality for many of our students is that they are lagging dramatically behind their peers in literacy development; this fact only increases the sense of urgency with which we approach our own preparation and development as literacy teachers. This text will provide you with a scientific, research-based foundation for teaching your students how to decode and understand text.

IV. The Balanced Literacy Approach: Some History

Literacy is the foundation of every student's learning, and learning to read English is a particularly challenging task. Far from a perfect alphabetic system, the letters of our language do not always correspond to sounds in a consistent, one-to-one manner (consider the spelling of the /f/ sound in *father* and in *phone*). It is both the importance and challenge of learning to read the English language that led to

⁸ <http://www.aasa.org>, accessed 7/10/2010.

⁹ Hart, Betty and Todd Risley. *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing, 1995.

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a great deal of controversy over the most effective ways to teach reading. Scholars, teachers, and researchers have long wrestled with how to teach students to understand and apply an imperfect alphabetic code without ignoring the whole purpose of being able to read—to understand and make meaning of written text.

From the colonial era through the mid-1800s, there was one common belief about how to teach children to read: teach them to decode (to break the complex alphabetic code through lots of exercises with letters and sounds), and give them material to read. Around the middle of the 19th century, many began to argue that breaking down the English language into sound-symbol relationships was too complex a process to ask children to learn. Horace Mann, the secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education in the mid-1800s, suggested that educators should teach students to recognize whole words on sight, rather than requiring them to use the arduous process of decoding. Over the next 100 years, children read from books such as the *Dick and Jane* leveled readers, that contained primarily the words they had already been taught to recognize. Upon encountering a word that had not been taught, children were told to use picture or context clues to determine its meaning. The emphasis on teaching students to recognize whole words automatically and to use clues to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words became known as the whole language approach.

The inherent challenge of learning to decode words within such a challenging alphabetic code is illustrated in the following poem, entitled *Hints on Pronunciation for Foreigners*.¹⁰

I take it you already know
Of tough and bough and cough and dough?
Others may stumble but not you,
On hiccough, thorough, laugh, and through.
Well done! And now you wish, perhaps,
To learn of less familiar traps?

Beware of heard, a dreadful word
That looks like beard and sounds like bird,
And dead: it's said like bed, not bead —
For goodness' sake don't call it "deed"!
Watch out for meat and great and threat
(They rhyme with suite and straight and debt.)

A moth is not a moth in mother
Nor both in bother, broth in brother,
And here is not a match for there
Nor dear and fear for bear and pear
And then there's dose and rose and lose —
Just look them up—and good and choose,
And cork and work and card and ward,
And font and front and word and sword,
And do and go and thwart and cart —
Come, come, I've hardly made a start!
A dreadful language? Man alive.
I'd mastered it when I was five.

In the 1950s, the publication of a highly polemical book by Rudolph Flesch stoked the fires of controversy yet again by arguing that phonics (decoding words by examining relationships between sounds and letters) is the only natural way to learn to read English. He explained that for the previous hundred years, good readers had been teaching themselves to break the alphabetic code with little formal instruction. Flesch argued that to deny instruction in that code to children who could not teach it to themselves was undemocratic. In truth, it was not Flesch's ideas about the importance of phonics instruction that created such uproar; rather, it was his politically charged rhetoric. As Marilyn Jager Adams notes in *Beginning to Read*, Flesch's book had several negative consequences: it polarized the field of research on how children best learn to read and oversimplified the phonics-based approach to teaching reading.¹¹ For

¹⁰ From a letter published in the *London Sunday Times* (January 3, 1965). Reprinted in Adams, Marilyn J. *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, p. 20.

¹¹ Adams, Marilyn Jager. *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, p. 25.

the thirty years following the book's publication, many argued over the role that phonics instruction should play in American classrooms.

Fortunately, the long history of debate and rancor concerning the best way to teach reading—a history so contentious as to have been dubbed the “Reading Wars” by some scholars—has given way to a relative consensus among educators that is built on data-driven evaluations of the effectiveness of various instructional strategies. *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, a 1998 report from the National Research Council, noted that children master the important skills, strategies, and knowledge they need to become successful readers and writers most quickly and effectively if their teachers integrate both systematic instruction in letter-sound relationships *and* critical thinking about literature in to their literacy classrooms. Researchers and educators often refer to this multi-faceted approach as “balanced literacy” instruction.

To be clear, a balanced literacy approach to reading requires that students receive instruction and have practice in **both** decoding and comprehension processes. However, balanced literacy instruction **does not** simply integrate the teaching and practice of phonics with the reading of poems, stories, and pieces of expository texts. To understand this distinction, consider how a basketball coach prepares beginning players for the game. First, the coach must provide instruction in discrete skills, such as ball handling, passing, shooting, and guarding, and then ask the players to practice those skills in daily drills. A coach would never expect such fundamental skills to be picked up solely through playing the game. **In a similar way, balanced literacy teachers provide direct, explicit and systematic instruction in the foundational skills of reading (the letter-sound relationships that govern the English language) and allow ample opportunities for students to practice putting those decoding skills into action before sending them off to read.**

However, a basketball coach would not force his players to practice three pointers for several years before he allowed them to attempt that important shot in a game. If they never got to play the game, players wouldn't understand the purpose of all that skill-building practice and would probably lose interest in the sport altogether. The same is true for beginning readers. While they must have their daily practice in basic reading skills (phonics), they must also have a chance to get in the game—by reading books on their independent level and thinking about more challenging books that are read aloud to them.

To continue this analogy one step further, as basketball players improve, many of the foundational skills they've practiced in drills become second nature, and the intensity with which they're able to play increases. Whereas beginning players may only be able to run a “four passes and shoot” offense, advanced players will be able to execute more complicated patterns, like back door cuts, pick and rolls, and end-of-shot-clock plays. Likewise, beginning readers who receive explicit, systematic phonics instruction and practice decoding simple words and reading easy books will eventually find that their ability to decode has become so automatic that they have to expend little cognitive energy on the process. At that point, their mental energy can be used to read and comprehend increasingly complex words and texts. All analogies break down at some point, but our line of reasoning is clear. We cannot expect our students to “pick up” phonics skills simply by immersing them in literature.

What distinguishes balanced literacy instruction from other approaches is the time allotted for decoding and comprehension (more time for phonics instruction in Kindergarten and first compared to upper grades), the emphasis given to component skills (following a research-based scope and sequence for how to teach sounds and letters), and the contexts in which decoding and comprehension skills are taught and practiced (from Word Study to Read Aloud to Independent Reading) vary according to students' language and literacy needs. The appropriate methods through which you will teach students to decode and to comprehend, and the scientific research that points to the most effective methods for doing so will be the focus of the remainder of this text.

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V. A Closer Look at Balanced Literacy Instruction

With the caveat that various researchers and educators have different formalized definitions of balanced literacy, at the core of this approach to teaching literacy are three, closely related concepts:

- **The Building Blocks of Literacy.** Balanced literacy calls for systematic, direct instruction of the underlying building blocks of reading and writing, including Book and Print Awareness, Phonological and Phonemic Awareness, Phonics and the Alphabetic Principle, Word and Structural Analysis, and Reading Fluency. Though subsequent chapters will explain these terms in great detail, the building blocks are the fundamental skills necessary to read independently, including: understanding the function and purpose of books and print; understanding that spoken speech is comprised of units of speech, like words, syllables, and individual sounds; using knowledge of letter-sound relationships to decode words; examining meaningful word parts, such as prefixes, suffixes, and roots; and, being able to decode automatically, so that reading is effortless and efficient.
- **Reading Comprehension.** Balanced literacy calls for many opportunities to think about and discuss books. Teachers provide students with explicit instruction and practice in how to use reading comprehension strategies to understand what they read. Additionally, because a wide vocabulary increases a student's ability to comprehend, teachers build students' vocabularies so that they know a multitude of words related to many content areas. Comprehension instruction is delivered in a variety of ways, from teacher-directed methods, such as modeled reading in the Read Aloud, to more student-directed methods, such as Guided Reading. This explicit instruction in comprehension strategies and vocabulary increases students' abilities to read and understand.
- **Writing.** Similarly, balanced literacy calls for frequent opportunities to write. Great literacy classrooms focus students' energy on transferring what they know about oral language onto the page and on using the writing process to communicate effectively. Additionally, great literacy classrooms focus on the defining characteristics of many genres, looking to published work as models and infusing these genre-specific characteristics into students' writing. Similarly to reading instruction, effective teachers employ a range of instructional methods, from teacher-directed to student-directed, in their writing lessons.

VI. Preview of the Literacy Text

The purpose of this text is to prepare you—a new teacher in an under-resourced school that serves students who will likely have lagging literacy skills—to use a balanced literacy instructional approach to teaching literacy. Thus, this text will provide you with research-based methods and tools for reading and writing instruction.

Corps members who are most successful as literacy teachers are those who approach literacy instruction with four key questions in mind. This course has been designed around those four questions:

What is literacy? Successful literacy teachers recognize that “literacy” is a complex idea, and that none of its various components can be emphasized to the exclusion of others. In **Chapter One**, we will explore several key components of “literacy,” emphasizing the implications of those components on your teaching. Those key components are:

- Book and Print Awareness
- Phonemic and Phonological Awareness
- Phonics and the Alphabetic Principle
- Word and Structural Analysis
- Reading Fluency
- Reading Comprehension Strategies
- Writing Skills and Strategies

What literacy knowledge and skills should I teach my students? In **Chapter Two**, we will survey the general evolution of literacy knowledge and skills that you should expect of your elementary school students by looking at the general literacy-related standards for each grade, K-5. We will examine how to use literacy diagnostics to determine individual student needs and how to track student progress toward literacy goals.

How do I teach literacy? This question dominates the rest of this course. While Chapter Two gives us a vision of where our students are headed, the next five chapters provide the vehicles for getting there.

- **Chapter Three - The Building Blocks of Literacy.** Chapter Three, in three parts, explores how to effectively teach the building blocks of literacy. Part I provides you with background knowledge about the construction of spoken and written English so that you will be prepared to help beginning and struggling readers learn to read. Part II looks at the foundational reading skills within each building block and discusses the order in which to teach those skills. In Part III, we turn to the most effective and efficient research-based methods that you will use to deliver instruction in the building blocks of literacy. With the assistance of the National Institute for Literacy's resource *Put Reading First*, found in the Related Readings section in the back of this text, we address some of the fundamental building blocks of learning to read.
- **Chapter Four - Reading Fluency: A Bridge from Decoding to Comprehension.** In Chapter Four, we consider several broad ways to build students' fluency (their ability to read as quickly and expressively as they talk) and then focus on a variety of instructional methods and techniques that will ensure your students leave your classroom on their way to reading quickly, effortlessly, and with meaningful expression.
- **Chapter Five - Methods of Comprehension Instruction: Vocabulary and Language Development.** Chapter Five explores methods for building and developing students' vocabularies to increase their comprehension. We will examine the critical role that vocabulary size, even for our youngest students, plays in determining reading comprehension. Then we'll look at instructional methods to use in the literacy and content-area classrooms, as well as daily practices that immerse students in a vocabulary-rich environment.
- **Chapter Six - Methods of Comprehension Instruction: Comprehension Strategies.** In Chapter Six, we take a look at the specific comprehension strategies that good readers use to construct meaning as they read and the instructional methods that good teachers use as they guide students to critically engage with many types of texts.
- **Chapter Seven - Methods of Writing Instruction.** In Chapter Seven, we take a three-part look at writing instruction. First we consider best practices for teaching the building blocks of writing, including English Language Conventions and penmanship. In Part II, we explore a series of the most effective instructional contexts for writing,

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methods that fall along a broad continuum of teacher-directedness. Finally, we examine teachers' implementation of the writing process—pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—and look at how to teach students to identify the characteristics of genres and use those characteristics in their own writing.

How should I structure my classroom to teach literacy each day? In **Chapter Eight**, we will provide an overview of a balanced literacy block, explaining the purposes of and instruction methods used in each component of the block. We will provide you with some vivid images of what instruction looks like in a strong literacy classroom throughout a typical literacy block. We will survey instructional methods and classroom structures and systems that lead students to become proficient readers and writers.

What Is Literacy?

Chapter One

From the perspective of student performance, literacy is a complex web of skills and knowledge related to engaging and expressing ideas—a web that, as mentioned in the introduction, serves as a foundation for all learning. We will introduce here the foundational concepts of literacy that are mandatory components of our students’ literacy progress. That is, as elementary school teachers, we must think of literacy as something more than the sum of the following parts:

- **Book and Print Awareness**
- **Phonemic and Phonological Awareness**
- **Phonics and the Alphabetic Principle**
- **Word and Structural Analysis**
- **Reading Fluency**
- **Reading Comprehension Strategies**
- **Writing Skills and Strategies**

Consider the graphic representation below, showing of these components as they relate to the two reading processes, decoding and comprehension. A close look at this graphic shows us that our ability to decode—to translate individual letters or various combinations thereof into speech sounds to identify and read words—is built upon our book and print awareness, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and the alphabetic principle, and word and structural analysis skills. Our ability to comprehend—to actively read and understand language—is based on our background knowledge, vocabulary, and ability to use comprehension strategies. Finally, our ability to read fluently—with speed, accuracy, and expression—is dependent on our ability to read non-decodable words on “sight,” to decode with such automaticity that we spend no mental energy in the process, and to read with appropriate phrasing. Reading fluency is the bridge from decoding to comprehension, hence its placement in the graphic. Without quick, accurate reading, comprehension is near impossible. We simply cannot focus on understanding a story if we must spend all of our time decoding the words on the page. Fluency takes us from word-by-word reading to smooth, natural reading that mimics the ease with which we speak.

Decoding				Comprehension					
Book and Print Awareness	Phonological and Phonemic Awareness	Phonics and The Alphabetic Principle	Word and Structural Analysis	Fluency			Background Knowledge	Vocabulary	Comprehension Strategies
				Sight Words	Automaticity	Phrasing			

Chart modified from <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/landing>

This chapter provides a relatively broad survey of the components of literacy. Our aim here is to give you the **basic background knowledge** you will need to fully access the detailed information discussed in later chapters.

Keep in mind that in chapters three through seven, you will learn highly detailed information about and will consider specific strategies for teaching reading and writing, and that having a basic understanding of these underlying concepts will clarify the purposes and contexts for those specific strategies. (For example, while we will introduce phonemic and phonological awareness here, we will dive into considerable detail about when and how to teach various aspects of phonological and phonemic

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awareness in chapter three.) We have included cross-references with each component of literacy to highlight places that you will re-encounter these concepts in more depth.

Book and Print Awareness [Ch. 3]

What it is:	Understanding the function of print and the characteristics of books and other print materials
So, I teach . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print represents oral language • Reading from left to right and top to bottom • Spaces between words and sentences • Standard text structures and organization, such as covers, backs, titles, and illustrations • Specific genre structures and organization, such as table of contents and index • Sentence structure • How to hold a book, turn its pages, and shelve it
Sample Instructional Methods:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Shared writing” activities in which the teacher writes what students are suggesting • Reading Big Books to teach print conventions (like directionality) • Activities (for Kindergarten students) in which children practice how to handle a book—how to turn pages, how to find the tops and bottoms of pages, and how to tell the front and back covers • Lessons in word awareness that help children become conscious of individual words—their boundaries, their appearance, and their length

Most teachers develop students’ Book and Print Awareness through constant, explicit modeling. When they hold up a Big Book that the class is reading, they “think aloud” about how to hold the book, where to start reading, and in what direction. While a teacher is writing the morning news on the board for his first graders, he might ask the students, “Should I start at the top of the board or the bottom?”

One of the most profound and personal connections that young children make to print involves their names. The presence of students’ names in several locations around the elementary classroom (on classroom management charts, reading group lists, classroom job boards, etc.) is of great importance as an instructional tool for new readers.

Phonemic and Phonological Awareness [Ch. 3]

What it is:	<p>Phonological Awareness: Understanding that the spoken language is made up of units of sounds, such as sentences, words, and syllables</p> <p>Phonemic Awareness: Understanding that spoken words are made up of individual phonemes (the smallest part of spoken language); being able to hear, identify, and manipulate those phonemes</p>
So, I teach . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and counting words in sentences • Identifying and counting syllables • Identifying and making rhyming words • Identifying, blending, segmenting, deleting, and substituting phonemes
Instructional Methods:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Kindergarten, singing common songs, such as “Mary Had a Little Lamb” that encourage students to attend to sounds in words • Language games (many from simple songs or nursery rhymes) that teach children to identify rhyming words and create rhymes on their own • Activities that help children understand that spoken sentences are made up of groups of separate words, that words are made up of syllables, and that words can be broken down into separate sounds • Auditory activities in which children manipulate the sounds of words, separate or segment the sounds of words, blend sounds, delete sounds, or substitute new sounds for those deleted

Phonemic awareness is a component of broader phonological awareness. In English, we rarely pause between our spoken words, except for emphasis. Consequently, it is necessary for children to learn consciously that common phrases like “thank you very much” are composed of four individual words. This is phonological awareness—recognition of oral word and syllable boundaries. Phonemic awareness is the recognition of *distinct* phonemes, or speech sounds, in words. For example, the word *squished* is composed of the phonemes /s/, /k/, /w/, /i/, /sh/, and /t/.

Phonics and the Alphabetic Principle [Ch. 3]

What it is:	Understanding the relationship between spoken sounds and written letters
So, I teach . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing and writing the alphabet letters • The alphabetic principle—that letters represent speech sounds • Phonics— the ability to match written letters with corresponding sounds to read and write words
Instructional Methods:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alphabetic knowledge activities in which children learn the names and sounds of letters and learn to identify them rapidly and accurately, not only by name but by sound as well • Lessons in sound-letter relationships that are organized systematically and that provide as much explicit instruction, practice and review as is necessary • Activities in which children blend the sounds in words, sort words according to patterns, and build words by combining and manipulating letters

Key to Kindergarten and first grade teachers’ success in teaching the alphabetic principle (the idea that written spellings represent spoken words) is this notion of a long-term plan for an “explicit and systematic” approach. Most school districts have adopted reading curricula that include instruction in explicit and systematic phonics. Generally, these curricula have sequenced instruction in letters and sounds in ways that are developmentally appropriate for students in the particular grades for which they were written. Typically, Kindergarteners learn the alphabet letters and shapes (both capital and lowercase) in their alphabet order. Then, they learn the sounds of the alphabet letters, beginning with those that will give them the earliest access to print and are more easily pronounced.

In first grade, instruction typically begins with two or three weeks reviewing the alphabet letters and the simplest sound-symbol correspondences. As the year continues, students learn the remainder of the sounds and the different letters that represent them.

Students in the second and third grades continue to review phonics skills. While they should have learned all of the sound-symbol correspondences in the first grade, many children will need review of the most complex of these. The focus in second and the first half of third grade is on multi-syllable decoding. In the later elementary grades, decoding instruction should be limited to word and structural analysis, although some students will doubtlessly require further support in skills they did not master in Kindergarten through third grades. Upper elementary students who struggle to decode need *highly* explicit instruction and intensive practice in sound-symbol correspondences and in decoding.

Every day my 1st and 2nd graders would learn a new phonics skill during our 15- minute mini-lesson. Once they figured out what letter or letter combinations made that particular sound, we decoded practice words with our cool new symbols. Later on, when going over our Open Court stories, they would point out examples of that day’s lesson. The impact of improved decoding skills on fluency and comprehension is staggering.

**Ana Gutierrez, Houston ‘00
Principal, Gateway Community Charters**

What Is Literacy?

Word and Structural Analysis [Ch. 3 and Ch. 5]

What it is:	Decoding a word by examining its meaningful parts Learning a word's definition by examining its meaningful parts
So, I teach . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefixes • Suffixes • Inflectional endings (the -ed in walked, the -s in dogs) • Greek and Latin roots • Compound words • Contractions
Instructional Methods:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit instruction in breaking words into parts to improve decoding speed and accuracy • Explicit instruction in the meaning of word parts to improve vocabulary and comprehension • Word families that help students apply their understanding of meaningful parts to many words (cycle, motorcycle, unicycle, bicycle, tricycle, cyclist)

As students are mastering sound-symbol correspondences and becoming able to decode simple words with ease, they will begin to read texts that contain increasingly complex, multisyllabic words. In order to decode and comprehend these words efficiently, students must be able to recognize and use meaningful word parts (such as prefixes or suffixes). For example, students who encounter the word "ungrateful" will be able to decode it quickly if they can recognize the words' three meaningful parts (its prefix, root, and suffix) and comprehend it easily if they understand the meaning of each part.

The content of word analysis lessons varies significantly between grade levels. First grade students will learn compounds, simple contractions, and some word endings. Second grade students will expand on these skills and learn some simple prefixes and suffixes as well. Our second graders will learn syllable types in their phonics lessons and can combine the use of syllable types and word analysis to decode longer words. Third graders will learn to use meaningful word parts not only for the purpose of decoding, but increasingly, to learn word meanings. Fourth and fifth graders will use Greek and Latin roots to decode words and learn their meanings. Though these grades, students will learn more complex meanings for increasingly less common roots, prefixes, and suffixes.

Reading Fluency [Ch. 4]

What it is:	The ability to read words quickly, accurately, and with expression
So, I should . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have students read the same passage repeatedly to improve rate and accuracy • Monitor and track speed and accuracy • Practice and use of decodable text • Practice reading sight words • Know the independent, instructional, and frustration levels of your students and only require them to read for fluency those texts at their instructional level or above
Instructional Methods:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model fluent reading during the Read Aloud and provide voice support for readers by using choral reading or echo reading • Strive for sight recognition of words through decoding, practice with irregular words, and an emphasis on certain "sight words," built from lists of the most common words students will encounter • Have students monitor and track their own accuracy and fluency progress by recording their weekly fluency results • Use poetry and reader's theaters to engage students in repeated readings of texts • Have students in Kindergarten through third grade read decodable text to practice sound-symbol correspondences

Reading accuracy refers to the ability to read words in a given passage correctly, without mispronunciations. Fluency combines accuracy with speed and expression. Research has shown that students who can read with accuracy and fluency are better able to comprehend the material because they are spending the majority of their time thinking about the text and not deciphering the words.

Research asserts that most children benefit from direct instruction in decoding, complemented by practice with simply written decodable stories. Stories should “match” the child’s reading level. Beginning readers should be able to read easily 90 percent or more of the words in a story, and after practice should be able to do so quickly, accurately, and effortlessly.

Reading Comprehension Strategies [Ch. 5 and 6]

What it is:	The ability to actively read and understand language
So, I should . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read aloud to children daily • Discuss what students understood from a text they read or heard • Teach vocabulary directly (through explicit instruction) and indirectly (through immersion in a rich language environment) • Plan thematic units of study to build students’ content knowledge and vocabulary in particular domains of study • Expressly model and teach comprehension strategies • Check for students’ understanding
Instructional Methods:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent reading of a variety of genres, both narrative and informational texts • Explicit instruction about both the meanings of words and their use in the stories the children are reading • Explicit instruction in strategies students can use to learn new vocabulary words • Discussions of new words that occur during the course of the day, for example in books that have been read aloud by the teacher, in content area studies and in textbooks • Activities that enable children to use context clues to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words in a reading passage • Activities that help children learn to use a variety of comprehension strategies to construct meaning as they read

Children learn new vocabulary, new ideas, new characters, and new concepts by listening to, reading, and thinking about stories and information texts. Yet, reading comprehension doesn’t simply happen as students pronounce the words on a page. Vocabulary, background knowledge, and the use of comprehension strategies all impact how well we understand what we read.

Vocabulary development plays a central role in reading comprehension. Students must be given the tools to understand new words so they can make the most out of reading. In addition to directly teaching key words found in a text, students must also learn strategies for independently conquering new vocabulary, including the use of context clues, word analysis, dictionaries, and other people.

Of course, vocabulary is just one part of developing reading comprehension skills. Students must also learn to analyze and assess what they read at increasingly complex levels. Because students are often at different levels when it comes to prior experience with specific topics, teachers must assist their students in broadening their basic knowledge before students engage with some texts. Before reading, you should develop your students’ prior knowledge by allowing them to share their knowledge of the subject and giving the class important information they will require to make sense of the text.

Finally, research has shown that students benefit tremendously from explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies (such as predicting, making connections, and asking questions). The most effective way to teach students to be strategic readers is to model the use of strategies while reading,

What Is Literacy?

through the teacher “thinking aloud.” Beginning in Kindergarten, any comprehension strategy can be modeled for students.

Writing Skills and Strategies [Ch. 7]

As with reading, the foundational concepts of writing must be taught in an explicit and systematic manner to students at all grade levels. This instruction begins in Kindergarten with the dictation of stories to correspond to children’s illustrations. The child first attempts to use the letters he or she is learning to label pictures independently. Then he or she moves on to early elementary grades, where he or she should learn sentence structure, parts of speech, and how to develop paragraphs with topic sentences and details on a variety of topics. Finally, in upper elementary grades, the child learns to complete full compositions of different styles targeted to different audiences. At each stage, students are exposed to specific stories and texts that serve as models as they learn the conventions of writing.

As they learn the writing skills necessary to convey their thoughts, students also develop strategies for utilizing the steps of the writing process so that their final product displays their ideas in the best manner possible. Through instruction on pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, teachers arm their students with the tools required to express their thoughts in print. Many teachers create recurring classroom structures that emphasize these writing practices. Writing Workshops (described in chapter seven) are, for example, a staple of the elementary classroom.

Conclusion and Review

When we think of literacy, most of us probably first think only of reading and writing. As indicated above, an elementary school teacher’s definition of literacy must be more complex than that. As elementary school teachers, we have to think about our students as relative strangers to reading and writing. We have to isolate and teach concepts that we may not remember learning ourselves, such as: reading from left to right, using context clues to learn new vocabulary, or writing a topic sentence.

For the purposes of introducing you to this complex notion of literacy, we have highlighted seven components of literacy instruction for elementary school students. In later chapters of this book, you will be learning more in-depth information about each and some research-based instructional methods designed to teach each of these components of literacy.

Do These Concepts Apply to English Language Learners?

This summer you will receive a supplemental packet of materials related to instruction of English language learners. We did, however, want to flag the fact as you read this text that instruction of English language learners, both in “bilingual” and in “English as a Second Language” settings, is built upon precisely the concepts and strategies that you are learning in this literacy course. While you will adjust some activities to match the needs of your English language learners, success with bilingual and ESL students requires a foundation in these basic components of literacy. Consider these findings from just one of many studies making this point:

[A]ll students, regardless of which language(s) is (are) spoken, must develop an awareness of phonology and syntax if they are to become literate. . . . The development of listening comprehension is also a necessary condition for reading readiness. The variety, amount, frequency, and quality of interactions greatly influence the development of phonological and syntactic awareness. . .¹²

As you have read in *Instructional Planning & Delivery*, most studies confirm that these skills are most effectively taught by providing students with a solid foundation in their first language before focusing on these issues in English, though this is not always practical or politically possible.

¹² Durgunoglu, Aydin and Banu Oney. “Literacy development in two languages: Cognitive and sociocultural dimensions of cross-language transfer.” US Department of Education, Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA), Reading Research Symposium. Washington, DC: 2000.

As a means of review, please consider the following examples of each component of literacy:

Fundamental Concept of Literacy	Definition Review	Teaching Examples
Book and Print Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing relationships between print and speech Knowing the conventions of print (left to right and top to bottom, spaces between words, variability in letters' shapes, placement of captions and titles, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asking kindergarteners which way to write, from top down or bottom up Emphasizing the space between words and sentences to first grade writers Teaching third graders about genres of texts
Phonemic and Phonological Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to think about individual spoken words as a sequence of individual sounds and as segments of sounds (syllables and individual sounds) Ability to add, delete, substitute, manipulate, and blend individual sounds within a word 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rhyming games for primary students Clapping the syllables in frequently used words Blending sounds together to make a word; segmenting sounds to take a word apart
Phonics and the Alphabetic Principle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding that written words are composed of patterns of letters that represent the sounds of the spoken word 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systematically and explicitly teaching sound-symbol correspondence Direct Instruction: "On your white boards, underline the letters that say the /sh/ sound." Teaching students to blend words
Word and Structural Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to solve the meaning of words by examining their meaningful parts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching second graders to decode and comprehend compound words Implementing a word analysis center that allows fourth graders to practice using prefixes and suffixes in sentences Asking fifth graders to create word family charts for common Greek and Latin roots
Reading Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to quickly and automatically translate words and sentences in spoken phrases The combination of reading rate (the speed with which text is decoded) and reading accuracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading decodable books Repeatedly reading the same text Asking students to read quietly as they listen to a book on tape Pairing students to read a text aloud together
Reading Comprehension Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to understand word meanings, extract meaning from groups of words (e.g., sentences and paragraphs), and draw inferences from speech and writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a teacher "think-aloud" to model using comprehension strategies Constant checking for understanding during reading assignments Teaching text structure Building students' vocabularies
Writing Skills and Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to communicate thoughts in written form and to recognize the processes that go into good writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instituting a morning meeting time for first graders when students tell news and the teacher—with help from students—writes out the news Implementing a Writer's Workshop and teaching third grade students to use the writing process effectively to produce a persuasive letter to the principal Expressly teaching grammar rules to fourth graders who are, in turn, creating a book of rules that they have learned

Literacy as a Big Goal: Standards and Diagnostics

Chapter Two

I. Reading, Writing, and Oral Communication Standards

II. The All-Important Role of Diagnostics in the Quest for Literacy

No matter what grade level or subject matter you are assigned, your first order of business is becoming familiar with what you are responsible for teaching to your students. An excellent literacy teacher invests time learning what his or her students should be able to do by the end of the year so that the teacher can plan backwards to create a sequence of steps over the course of the year. As we have outlined in *Instructional Planning & Delivery*, these same teachers diagnose their students to calibrate their instructional pace and begin instruction at the appropriate level.

This chapter focuses on these two components of literacy instruction planning. First, what are appropriate literacy goals for a particular set of students? We will survey the general literacy-related expectations and standards for each grade level, Kindergarten through fifth. Second, how do you diagnose your students' current literacy abilities? We will introduce you to various types of diagnostic tools that your district might use and that you will have access to at the summer institute and in your regional offices.

I. Reading, Writing, and Oral Communication Standards

As you read this, you probably do not know precisely what grade level you will be teaching this fall. Given the immense structural, budgetary, and organizational challenges facing the under-resourced schools where we place teachers, even those of you who think you know your placement may find changes waiting for you when you reach your region.

In Part I, we familiarize you with the whole range of elementary literacy standards, from Kindergarten through fifth grade. Not only is this broad preparation prudent in cases of a change in your teaching assignment, but having a strong foundation in literacy standards across grade levels will also make you a much stronger teacher in your own grade level. First, it will give you a bird's-eye view of the educational landscape in which your students are placed. Knowing what they have learned in previous grades and what they are expected to learn in the future makes your job more meaningful and helps you to understand how crucial it is that your students master all of your grade level standards. Second, as you will soon become aware, no classroom is filled with students who are at the same level. While your door may say, "Welcome to Third Grade," within your classroom you will have students who range in ability dramatically, across several grade levels of standards. It is your responsibility to catch your students up to state and district standards, so you must be knowledgeable in all elementary standards to recognize what gaps need to be filled in. Of course, these rough estimations of the learning standards for each grade will ultimately be trumped by your specific state or district standards. You can expect, however, that those specific standards will be closely aligned with what we have listed here.

We have included a detailed instructional scope and sequence in chapter three, and comprehensive lists of what students at each grade level are expected to learn are in the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 1-5: "Elementary Literacy Standards"—this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet). ✖ But here we will provide a summarized overview of those more detailed lists. The summaries that follow of what students in each grade level are expected to know have been adapted from several sources, including Kendall and Marzano's comprehensive survey of standards and benchmarks for

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education across the country,¹³ various state standards, the work of reading researcher Louisa Moats,¹⁴ and the National Research Council's *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success*.¹⁵

Kindergarten—Setting the Foundation for Reading and Writing

According to the National Research Council, Kindergarten teachers are responsible for two over-arching goals:

- By the end of the year, Kindergarteners should have a solid foundation in **book/print awareness**.
- By the end of the year, Kindergarteners should be comfortable with and have a positive association with the fundamental concept that we *learn from print*.

More specifically, these overarching goals require that a teacher focus on the format of books and other print resources. By the year's end, Kindergarteners have learned to identify and use the parts of a book (such as the front and back covers and title page) and know that print is organized and read in a consistent manner (from left-to-right and top-to-bottom). And, though they are not expected to become fluent readers by the end of the year, Kindergarteners should come to understand that print carries meaning and that they are rapidly becoming capable of determining what that meaning is.

Be sure to check out student work samples like those supplied by the Board of Education. It's vitally important to gauge your expectations in terms of concrete examples. You will be better equipped to plan lessons, set the tone in the classroom, and teach toward big goals. I have found that my class will only perform as well as I expect it to. My first year, I had little idea what Kindergartners should know, and was happy to see any progress. The second year, I expected a little bit more – and my kids' performance reflected that. Now, my children are reading on a first grade level in January.

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To this end, the teaching of both **phonological and phonemic awareness** and **phonics and the alphabetic principle** are very important in Kindergarten. In the phonological awareness arena, students should begin to understand that sentences are made up of words, and that words contain both syllables and individual sounds, or phonemes. They should be able to hear and produce rhyming and alliteration, as well as begin to segment and blend simple words (to break the word *cat* down into the sounds /c... a... t/ and put those sounds together again to say *cat*). Students should also be able to recognize, name, and easily write the individual letters of the alphabet (both capital and lowercase), and know their corresponding sounds. They should begin to use this letter/sound knowledge, attaching letters to the beginning and ending sounds of spoken words. For instance, when they attempt to write *dog*, they should be able to hear that the word begins with /d/ and ends with /g/ and use the letters *d* and *g* to spell the word.

Additionally, the Kindergarten teacher has the responsibility of introducing students to the concept that books and other print materials are sources of information. Much of students' future education will build on a child's receptivity to learning from print. Thus, one key task of the kindergarten teacher is to build students' motivation to read books by building their foundational reading skills and exposing them to a wide variety of texts through the Read Aloud.

¹³ Kendall, John and Robert Marzano. *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education, 3rd Edition*. Arlington, VA: ASCD, September 2000.

¹⁴ Moats, Louisa Cook. *Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2000.

¹⁵ Burns, M. Susan et al, Eds. *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999.

First Grade—Major Steps toward Independent Reading

While children are in fact “learning to read” throughout elementary school, for many students the first grade is where they know enough to actually sit down with a book and decode and comprehend words on their own. As the National Research Council explains, “First grade is the time when children bring together the many language and literacy skills they have been attaining—book and print awareness, phonemic awareness, letter and word knowledge, background information about different topics—and start getting comfortable with the conventions of associating letters and sounds.” For many children, first grade is the time when they move from “pretend reading” to conventional reading.

By the end of the year, first graders should have a firm grasp on the alphabetic principle; they should increase their understanding of sound-spelling relationships, by learning vowel teams, diphthongs, *r*-controlled vowels, consonant digraphs, and consonant blends.¹⁶ First graders should blend the letter sounds throughout a word and spell most one-syllable words accurately, as well as common word endings like *-ing* and *-ed*. With a text on their independent level, first graders should read 60-70 words per minute. Further, these students should become comfortable summarizing and identifying the main idea of texts that they have read.

In writing, students should be able to plan and organize their ideas and compose readable drafts with some degree of phonetic spelling. First graders should write complete sentences that employ basic punctuation and capitalization.

Thus, the literacy advancements made by students in first grade are vast. For a more comprehensive overview of first grade standards, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 2: “Elementary Literacy Standards”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖ Of course, a reality of teaching first grade (and any elementary grade, for that matter) is that you will encounter a wide range of student ability levels in your classroom. A first grade teacher may have some students who can match only a few letters to their sounds and others who can read on their own. In first grade, all of the pieces of literacy that have been practiced in Kindergarten begin to come together. Children become, in a real sense, independent readers.

Second and Third Grade

Unfortunately, disparate quality of past literacy instruction begins to evidence itself quite dramatically in second and third grade. That is, second and third grade teachers are likely to have some students who read independently and others who are still mastering basic phonemic awareness and understanding of the alphabetic principle. The mid-elementary teacher’s challenge therefore is to quickly identify those students who need remediation in the basics of phonics and the alphabetic principle and simultaneously move all students forward with two key goals:

- Building automatic word recognition, spelling skills, and reading fluency
- Improving comprehension by building knowledge of words, text structures, and conscious strategies required for understanding and using text

More specifically, this means that by the end of the year, second graders should be able to recognize a variety of syllable types and accurately decode regular multi-syllable words. These students should read

¹⁶ Vowel teams: two or more vowels that create one speech sound (the /ea/ in team).

Diphthong: a speech sound that begins with one vowel sound and moves to another within the same syllable (the /oi/ in *noise* and the /ou/ in *mouse*).

R-controlled vowels: sounds in which the *r* influences the pronunciation of the preceding vowel (such as *car* or *fur*).

Consonant digraphs: two letters that represent one sound (such as /sh/ and /th/).

Consonant blends: two- or three-letter consonants that are blended together quickly (such as /bl/ or /squ/).

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more than 80 words per minute and should use a wide variety of reading strategies (like summarizing, questioning, and making connections) in their own reading. Further, second graders should begin to make inferences as they read and should be able to recall many facts and details of both fiction and nonfiction texts. In their writing, second graders produce a variety of compositions (including stories, reports, and correspondence) and are able to spell compound words, words with endings like *-ed* and *-ing*, vowel team words, and words containing variant patterns with increasing accuracy. By the end of second grade, students should be able to write one complete paragraph.

During the third grade, students should be honing those same decoding and comprehension skills with more difficult words and texts and more complex compositions. Third graders should begin to use the structure of words (common roots, prefixes, and suffixes) and context clues to determine the meaning of unknown words. These students will begin to read longer works of fiction independently—with fluency and comprehension. These students write consistently in paragraph form and are able to combine information from a number of sources to produce written products that are longer, more organized, and more descriptive. They are able to apply rules of grammar and mechanics in writing. Third grade students learn to write in cursive.

You will probably hear the expression that during the second and third grades, students are making the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” For a more complete list of second and third grade accomplishments, see again the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 3-4: “Elementary Literacy Standards”). ✖

Fourth and Fifth Grade

The primary goals in the upper elementary grades are (1) increased reading accuracy and fluency along with (2) more complex and independent use of both reading comprehension and writing skills and strategies. At this level, word recognition centers on word origins, root words, prefixes and suffixes, and vocabulary. Comprehension should become more independent, as students learn to monitor their own understanding of texts and implement various strategies when meaning is lost. Students access the whole range of literature, including fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, historical fiction, etc. There is a strong emphasis on inference, as students are expected to draw conclusions from the text based on evidence rather than on actual statements. There is also much more use of figurative language in upper elementary reading, and students must rely on their knowledge of similes, metaphors, and symbolism to get the most out of a text.

Writing instruction shifts from mechanics to style. Fourth and fifth graders use descriptive language and more complex sentence structure in their writing. As students advance through the upper grades, their compositions move from paragraphs to essays. They learn to research, organize, and effectively structure a variety of written forms. These students should be developing a strong sense of the process of writing, independently using pre-writing strategies (such as graphic organizers, outlines, and story maps) to develop ideas. Students edit written work, looking for grammar and format issues. Students continue to write in a whole range of formats, including narratives, poetry, expository compositions, letters, and autobiographies.

Upper elementary instruction straddles content and literacy. The final years of students’ elementary school education improve their ability to understand the meaning of text and express their thoughts and opinions in more complex written forms, preparing them for the content-heavy courses they will face in middle school. For a more comprehensive overview of fourth and fifth grade standards, see again the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 5: “Elementary Literacy Standards”). ✖

II. The All-Important Role of Diagnostics in the Quest for Literacy

One of the primary purposes for a teacher's intimate knowledge of literacy standards is to inform the teacher's diagnosis of his or her students' literacy skills. As we discussed in *Instructional Planning & Delivery* (if you haven't read the first two chapters of that text, you might want to view them now), diagnosing your students' abilities and progress is a necessary foundation for achieving the significant academic gains that your students must make in order to catch up with students in more privileged communities. Excellent teachers of literacy recognize the high returns that come from careful and constant assessment of their students' literacy skills.

To teach literacy as effectively and efficiently as you can, you need to know what your students already know so that you can build on that knowledge, and avoid reviewing material your students have already mastered so that you can fill in any gaps that may be present in students' literacy development. Diagnostics are initial assessments that determine students' current literacy abilities, providing you with a starting line from which to measure students' growth over time. Because literacy plays such a central role in all areas of education, it is essential that elementary teachers follow the constant cycle of diagnosis, instruction, and assessment that is the crucible of excellent instruction. To succeed as a teacher of literacy, you must diagnose your students' literacy abilities at the beginning of the year and then continually assess and chart their progress throughout the year.

Initial Diagnoses: Determining the Starting Line

In this section, we are going to dive more deeply into the assessments and diagnostics that you will need to use at the very beginning of the school year in order to know where your students are beginning in relation to the ambitious goals you are setting for their achievement. Perhaps the most obvious benefit of such an initial diagnosis is that it shows you where to begin your instruction. That is, you might learn that the overwhelming majority of your fifth grade students can decode one and two syllable words, but stumble over words that are any more complex. Information of this type will inform your instructional planning, making it more focused and efficient. In our fifth grade example, you would know to focus your instruction on multi-syllable decoding, which would include syllable types and syllable division, as well as word parts (such as prefixes, suffixes, and roots) that will help your students break large words into comprehensible chunks to decode. Having this diagnostic information will also serve as a valuable baseline to which you can compare your students' progress later in the year.

Moreover, teachers come away from the diagnostic process with a much clearer sense of the challenges they will face related to variance in student knowledge. While the wide range of student abilities and knowledge found in a given class of students may be shocking, unsettling, and initially overwhelming, much more disturbing is the prospect of attempting to teach students at such varied levels without even knowing that this variance exists. Thus, one reason to carefully diagnose students' literacy skills at the beginning of the year is to immediately begin thinking about how to best differentiate instruction so as to maximize the academic gains of all students.

So, How Do I Diagnose My Students' Literacy Skills?

Understanding the importance of performing an initial diagnosis of your students' literacy abilities is just the first step. Next, you must determine the diagnostic method you will use. Many districts or schools have a particular approach that you will be required to use in the fall. Others leave this decision up to individual grade levels or teachers. No matter what position you find yourself in, it is important to have an understanding of the most common diagnostic tools available. Even in the lower grades, your school will likely have access to standardized test data that can serve as a useful source of information about students' literacy skills. The breadth and depth of the information in that data varies from state to state and district to district. In many cases, however, teachers find that the investment of time and energy it

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may take to get that data for your students provides specific insights into students' strengths and weaknesses.

In addition to standardized tests, there are many other assessment tools that can help fill the gaps left by incomplete standardized test data. Here we will briefly introduce you to some of these types of assessments. Among the most useful forms of diagnostics that you might encounter are:

- **Phonological Awareness Tests.** These diagnostic tools measure students' phonological awareness skills and should be given to all Kindergarteners and first graders, as well as second graders who are experiencing reading difficulties. Though there is variation between phonological awareness tests, most give you insight into a student's specific levels of phonological awareness: can the student hear and count the syllables in a word, identify and count various sounds in a word, and identify words that rhyme and don't rhyme? The teacher gives the tests to the whole class or a small group of students. You will have access to a Phonological Awareness Screening Test, found in CORE's *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures*, at the summer institute and in your regional offices.
- **Phonics Surveys.** To measure students' ability to decode words, teachers often give a phonics survey to individual students. Though specific tests vary, most measure students' ability to name letters, identify the corresponding sounds for consonants and vowels, and decode single and multi-syllable words containing a variety of patterns. For instance, this assessment asks a student to read from a list of real and pseudo words, such as *sip* and *vop* to see if they can read words with short vowel sounds, and *lute* and *joad* to identify long vowel spellings. The teacher is able to use the results of this diagnostic to determine the phonics needs of individual students, and to tailor his or her instruction accordingly. Again, you will have access to such an assessment through CORE's *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures*.
- **Qualitative Spelling Inventory.** These diagnostic tools measure spelling skills and developmental levels of phonics knowledge at each grade level, Kindergarten through fifth. To administer this assessment, give students a series of progressively more challenging words (meaning you begin with single-syllable, short vowel words like *bed* and progress to two syllable words with unusual spelling patterns like *hoping* and *squirreℓ*) and compare their spellings to the stages of spelling development. Analyzing a student's spelling, in particular the mistakes he or she makes, will shed light on his or her knowledge of sound-symbol correspondence. This sort of assessment can also be easily administered on a class-wide level, and can be used to get a general sense of your students' phonics skills and their understanding of letter-sound relationships. A "Sample Qualitative Spelling Inventory" is included in the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 6), which can be found at the Resource Exchange on TFiANet, and another is contained in CORE's *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures*. ✕

I use the Elementary Spelling Inventory from Words Their Way (by Bear et al.) which has been very helpful in guiding my spelling and phonics instruction. This assessment helps me determine which stage of spelling development my students are in and provides activities and lessons to reach those varied levels. The Elementary Spelling Inventory helped me discover that most of my students this year needed instruction in long vowel patterns. So before doing more complex patterns, we started with long vowels.

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- **Word Lists.** Finally, you can ask individual students to read from a Word List, which contains short lists of progressively more challenging words. When a student says a word incorrectly or skips it, the teacher records that as a “miscall.” By noting the grade level of the word list where a student begins to have a critical mass of miscalls (different tests have different definitions of that “critical mass,” most say to stop when a student reads five words for a grade level incorrectly), the teacher can approximate the grade level of the student’s word recognition abilities. A sample Word List can be found below, and another, called the “San Diego Quick,” is contained in CORE’s *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures*.

Pre-primer	Primer	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
it	now	school	neighbor	vegetables	reasonable
is	like	birthday	strong	poured	human
to	was	many	kitchen	thirsty	government
come	run	her	country	happiness	abandon
said	children	again	always	interested	junior
little	all	frog	blow	breathless	typewriter
for	but	worked	mouth	calves	security
here	around	place	corner	lever	bushel
red	white	there	wheels	deciding	promote
want	into	nest	because	wealthy	embark

Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
admission	particular	imperative	philosophical	dialogue	demitasse
social	triumphant	fundamental	buoyant	belligerent	peremptory
governor	conservation	antique	abhor	figurative	longevity
knowledge	foreigner	dormitory	masquerade	gregarious	marinade
navigation	wrought	functional	antiquity	avaricious	corpuscle
scientific	opinion	anatomy	celestial	expenditure	philanthropy
quality	immortal	proposition	perpendicular	sympathize	deterioration
improvement	estimate	reluctant	taciturn	monarchy	exhilarated
educational	bacteria	idealist	pessimistic	intercede	apportionment
youth	biscuit	enthusiastic	indoctrinate	ultimatum	patronizing

Source: *Word Recognition Grade Placement Form A, Inventory of Early Development—Revised*.

- **Comprehension Retell Assessment.** As the name implies, this assessment approach requires students to retell a story to the teacher that the student has read. By recording what aspects of the story the child recognizes and retells, the teacher establishes a picture of the student’s literacy skills. When a Comprehension Retell Assessment is done as part of a **Qualitative Reading Inventory**, or **QRI**, the teacher can measure a variety of skills—such as reading comprehension, fluency, and accuracy—to determine a student’s general literacy level. There are multiple specific procedures for this type of assessment, and multiple published versions, but QRIs often involve a student reading a graded text out loud while the teacher records speed and accuracy; after the reading, the student responds to comprehension questions posed by the teacher. Typically, a QRI requires 30-45 minutes to administer to an individual student.
- **Reading Habits Checklist.** Another relatively simple approach to assessing your students’ literacy skills is through a “reading habits checklist.” This is a table of characteristics of strong readers (discussed more in chapter six) that you can keep on a clipboard and fill out through informal observations and evaluations over a period of time. Those might include, for example, staying focused, note-taking skills, skimming skills, etc. You can keep this on a clipboard and fill it out through informal observations and evaluations over a period of time. Your students’ literacy strengths and weaknesses will begin to emerge as patterns on the grid.

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- **Timed Reading Exercise.** To measure a student’s fluency (also called oral reading rate), you would conduct a Timed Reading Exercise with a text on this student’s independent reading level (discussed in “Searching for the Independent Reading Level” below). A Timed Reading Exercise is relatively easy to administer.
 1. First, **choose a text or passage on the student’s independent level** with at least 100 words.
 2. Before you begin, **give the student a quick overview** of the passage and explain what you are asking her to do. *“Taylor, we’re going to spend about 5 minutes measuring your reading fluency – remember that means how well you can read like you talk. We’re working on improving your reading fluency because if you have good fluency, your brain has the space to understand what you read. The passage you’re going to read today is about the Gold Rush, one of the factors that caused westward expansion in the United States. Please begin reading it at a rate that is comfortable for you. If you make a mistake, you can correct yourself. If you come to a word you don’t know, try to figure it out on your own. Does that sound ok? Alright, go ahead.”*

I use several diagnostics in combination with each other—principally, the SRI (Scholastic Reading Inventory), a computerized test that gives a quick-and-dirty look at the approximate level of each student, and the QRI (Qualitative Reading Inventory). The QRI gives an amazingly in-depth look at each student’s “level” with varying levels of texts and knowledge backgrounds. It takes a while to administer (about 45 minutes a kid) but is the BEST use of time. It gives a wealth of information: students’ issues with fluency, phonics, comprehension, texts of different genres. Once I administer the QRI and know where all the students are at, I form guided reading groups and make instructional plans for each student for the year.

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 3. Decide how many minutes you want the student to read (between one and five minutes). At the appointed time, stop the student. Tally the total number of words read (correct or incorrect) and divide it by the number of minutes. This result is their **oral reading rate**, in words per minute, for the text that they read.
 4. You might also rate the **students’ overall fluency/prosody** by placing students into one of three levels:
 - a. Level 1: student reads a word at a time in a halting manner, often has to sound out words, and reads without expression or attention to punctuation.
 - b. Level 2: reads with some expression and attention to punctuation, may stop to sound out some words or repeat words.
 - c. Level 3: reads smoothly with good expression, phrasing, and attention to punctuation; any repetition of words is to self-correct mistakes (which are generally rare).¹⁷

¹⁷ Modified from Beers, Kyleene. *When Kids Can’t Read: What Teachers Can Do*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003, p. 211.

Diagnosing Writing

Given its fundamentally “qualitative” nature, diagnosing and assessing writing skills poses special challenges. Most teachers—even at the kindergarten and first grade level—find that rubrics are an invaluable tool. While we will not rehash the purposes and construction of rubrics here (see the “Student Assessment” chapter of the *Instructional Planning & Delivery* text), we do want to point you to several excellent tools for evaluating your students’ writing.

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) has created a “Beginning Writer’s Continuum” that is useful for evaluating even Kindergarteners’ and first-graders’ writing.¹⁸ This rubric, which helps you rate your students’ writing according to its ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions, allows you to see that a level one writer (classified as “experimenting”) uses scribbles to represent ideas and dictates a story to the teacher, while a level four writer (deemed “capable”) is able to tell a story that makes a point and includes ideas that are generally on topic.

That rubric is based on an excellent framework for assessing elementary students’ writing. As the NWREL explains, you should approach writing evaluation systematically, using the rubric-creation process to delineate clearly what you are looking for in students’ writing. As mentioned above, the NWREL suggests that you evaluate writing with respect to the following traits:

- **Ideas.** You should evaluate student writing for its content, of course. Is the message clear?
- **Organization.** Elementary teachers spend a considerable amount of time thinking about how to teach the organization of a piece of writing. They use graphic organizers, story maps and outlining techniques to teach students the form and structure of various genres of text. You should evaluate your students’ writing on those factors as well.
- **Voice.** This criterion becomes more and more clear as students’ literacy skills develop. Whenever possible, you should evaluate student writing for the student’s personal engagement in the process. Is there a personal tone and flavor to the piece that shows that it came from this student?
- **Word Choice.** Word choice, of course, is the use of rich, colorful, precise language that communicates not just in a functional way, but also in a way that moves and enlightens the reader. With age-appropriate adjustments, we should always encourage students to think carefully about word choice.
- **Sentence Fluency.** You should also judge students’ writing on its fluency. Sentence fluency is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, and the way in which the writing plays to the ear, not just to the eye. How does it sound when read aloud? Is it choppy and rambling, or rhythmic and graceful? Having explicit discussions about sentence fluency, even with novice writers, helps develop students’ habits of writing with the listener in mind.
- **Conventions.** Perhaps the easiest criteria for assessing writing are the mechanical correctness of the piece: spelling, grammar and usage, paragraphing (indenting at the appropriate spots), use of capitals, and punctuation. Writing that is strong in conventions has been proofread and edited with care. You might decide to focus on different areas of writing mechanics for different projects, depending on what has been the focus of your direct instruction.

What are “Anchor Papers”?

“Anchor Papers” are a series of written products (essays, letters, or paragraphs, for example) of varying levels of quality that a teacher can use as benchmarks against which to judge the level of writing proficiency of his or her students. Anchor papers usually include essays (or some other written product) of at least four different levels. See “Anchor Papers” in the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 8-11); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFSNet. ✖

¹⁸ “Beginning Writer’s Continuum.” Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Library. Online at <http://www.nwrel.org>.

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- **Presentation.** Finally, you should evaluate student writing for its “presentation” value. This idea goes beyond handwriting to the way the product is packaged.

For a more in-depth look at this rubric, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 7: “5-Trait Assessment for Beginning Writers”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFSNet. Additionally, you will find a set of documents explaining precisely what qualities might qualify under each of these concepts for each score, one through five. See the “Writing Assessment Scoring Guide” in the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 12-16). ✖

Tracking Student Progress—Using Running Records

Once you have diagnosed your students’ abilities on the front-end, a key to your success as a literacy teacher will be your system for tracking student progress. You may have a number of incoming sets of data about your students’ performance. As we discuss in *Instructional Planning & Delivery*, managing that information is well worth your time and effort as it brings clarity and focus to your instructional planning.

One particularly quick and manageable approach to obtaining and recording information about student

For reading levels, I assessed early and often using running records (along with a comprehension check). My students know where they are and where they want to be going, and they are able to use the leveling system in the classroom library to make sure that they are reading books at the correct level. I also have a system where my students recommend books to each other through a “5 star book” form, and then receive stickers when they have completed books. This also helps them to monitor their progress in reading and see their levels improve.

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progress involves taking what are known as “running records.” A running record is a record of errors, or miscues, that readers make as they are reading a text. This simple assessment tool offers teachers a way to quickly and easily assess students’ reading behaviors “on the run.” Generally speaking, running records involve the teacher listening carefully to a child as the child reads a passage of text, and marking symbols for various types of errors. The teacher can then review those errors to find patterns that will inform instruction. For instance, a teacher might analyze notes from a running record and notice that a student consistently miscues while decoding the middle of a word. This teacher can surmise that the student has not grasped the multitude of vowel spelling patterns and as a result, decide to provide some individualized instruction in this important phonics skill.

Running records, which are useful for students of all grade levels, do not have to be complicated. In fact, you can implement a running record system with blank sheets of

paper kept in a notebook. Consider the following instructions for a running record system in which the teacher uses lined writing paper to record errors:

- Sit beside the student and explain that you want her to read the book independently.
- Read the title of the book to the child.
- Give the child the book and use a record form or a blank sheet of paper to mark her reading behavior and record miscues.
- When a child stops during reading, allow enough time for her to work on a problem before you supply the word. It is also important that you do not wait so long that she loses the meaning of the story while trying to solve the unknown word.
- Use a standardized system to record words read correctly, substitutions, omissions, and deletions.
- Take note of self-corrections. When a student corrects a miscue herself, it is an indication that she is monitoring her own comprehension.

- You may also wish to note hesitations, repetitions, and other reading behaviors which may not affect accuracy but may provide information about the strategies the reader is using.
- Divide the number of words read correctly by the total number of words and multiply by 100 to find percentage of accuracy.
- To determine oral reading rate, time the student while she is reading. Divide the total number of correct words by the total time to get the words correct per minute (WCPM).

Below is a passage that a third grade teacher used for a running record. Here is a list of reading mistakes (miscues) this teacher recorded and what symbols she used to do so:

Errors	If a student says a word other than the one printed, the teacher writes that in.
Attempted Decoding	If a student tries several times to say a word, the teacher writes the incorrect response(s).
Self-Correction	If a student corrects an error him- or her-self, the teacher writes "SC."
Word Skip	A skipped word is crossed out.
Word Insertions	A word that is not in the text is added.
Teacher Assistance	If a student is stuck and asks for or receives help, the teacher writes "TA" next to the word.
Repetition	Repetition is usually not scored as an error, but many teachers track it just to watch for patterns. Many teachers use an underline.

The teacher recorded miscues throughout the text on this sheet as the student was reading; then she tallied those miscues in the boxes below the passage afterwards.

From *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*,¹⁹ by Louis Sachar:

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ **ter-bly** ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ >**she** ✓ ✓
 Mrs. Jewls had a terribly nice face. She stood at the bottom of Wayside school and looked up.

✓ ✓ **su-pos-ed** ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ **TA** ✓
 She was supposed to teach a class on the thirtieth story.

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ **SC** ✓ ✓ **scarred** ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ -
 The children on the thirtieth story were scared. They had never told anybody what ~~had~~

✓ ✓ ✓ **SC** ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
 happened to Mrs. Gorf. They hadn't had a teacher for three days. They were afraid of what their new

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ >**before** ✓ ✓ **ter-bly** ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
 teacher would be like. They had never had a nice teacher. They were terribly afraid of nice teachers.

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ **wind-ing cracking** ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
 Mrs. Jewls walked up the winding, creaking staircase to the thirtieth story. She was also afraid.

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ - ✓ ✓ ✓ **TA SC** ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
 She was afraid of the children. She had heard ~~that~~ they would be horribly cute children. She had never

TA ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ **hor-bly** ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
 taught cute children. She was horribly afraid of cute children.

¹⁹ Sachar, Louis. *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*. New York: Avon Books, 1978, pp. 15-16.

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✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ **ter-bly** ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
 She opened the door to the classroom. She was terribly nice. The children could tell just by
 ✓ ✓ ✓
 looking at her.
 ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ **hor-bly** ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
 Mrs. Jewls looked at the children. They were horribly cute. In fact, they were much too cute to
 ✓ ✓
 be children.
 ✓ **do not** ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
 "I don't believe it," said Mrs. Jewls. "It's a room full of monkeys!"

Type of Miscue	Substitution	Assisted	Insertion	Omission	Repetition	Self-Correction	
Number	10	3	2	2	0	4	
Total	17						
WCPM	81						

Word Recognition Scoring Guide (for 100 word piece of text)	
Total Miscues	Level
0-1	Independent Level
2-4	Indep./ Instructional
5	Instructional Level
6-9	Instructional/Frustration
10+	Frustration Level

[Note you will need to choose 100 words of the text to use this table]

An error analysis allows you to see where a student's decoding and fluency breaks down – does she struggle with multi-syllable words? If so, does she simply articulate the initial sound and then substitute another word that starts with the same sound? By examining this third grader's reading (above), the teacher can see that his main struggle is decoding multi-syllable words, especially those that contain the schwa sound (pronounced /uh/) at syllable junctures (as in *horribly* and *terribly*).

Searching for the Independent Reading Level

Running records are one way to determine whether your students are reading materials that are in an appropriate range of difficulty for them. To do that, count the total number of miscues. Divide that number by the total number of words read: for example, 10 miscues in 200 words is a 5% miscue rate. Subtract that rate from 100% accuracy, and you have 95% accuracy, which means it is on the student's independent level.²⁰ If we apply this formula to the third grade student's reading of *Sideways Stories*, we find that he has read the passage with 91% accuracy, which makes the text at his instructional level—a bit too hard for him to read independently, but appropriate if he has teacher or parent support.

²⁰ Modified from Beers, Kylee. *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003, p. 211.

- **Independent Level.** If a text is on students' independent level of reading, they will find fewer than one in twenty words (5%) difficult to decode or understand the meaning of. To roughly determine if a text is at a students' independent level, some teachers use the "five finger rule," where the student is asked (and taught, so he can use this method to choose texts he reads on his own) to read an approximately 100-word passage and put up a finger every time he comes across a word he can't read. If he puts up fewer than five fingers, the text is at his independent level and he will be able to read it and comprehend it without assistance from the teacher; the process of doing so will also build his fluency, due to the repeated exposure to words he already knows.
- **Instructional Level.** When students recognize 90 - 95% of the words in a text (so 5 - 10 fingers go up) the text is at their instructional level. In that range, we know that students, with support from the teacher, will expand their vocabulary and will be able to comprehend the text. A text at students' instructional level is a perfect text to be read with teacher support and instruction in word recognition, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies.
- **Frustration Level.** If a student has difficulty with the pronunciation or meaning of more than two out of every twenty words in the text (so recognize fewer than 90% of the words), that student is reading at a "frustration level." This delineation and definition is important because we know that students who are constantly reading at their frustration level have significant trouble understanding the reading and usually lose motivation to continue reading. If students are experiencing this rate of error, the teacher probably needs to shift to a more manageable text.

Teachers should use their recognition of students' frustration, instructional, and independent reading levels to judge how much assistance they will need to provide for a chosen text, how to guide students to find independent reading material, and how to be sure that they are giving their students appropriately challenging reading materials.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have surveyed the general literacy standards for each grade level, Kindergarten through fifth. Internalizing your state's reading, writing, and oral communication standards will be critical to you as you set goals for what your students will be able to do at the end of their year in your classroom. We also explored a range of diagnostics and assessments that you can use to determine your students' current levels of literacy ability. By having a clear end goal (your students meeting or exceeding state standards) and a firm understanding of your students' starting points (information from diagnostics), you will be prepared to provide excellent literacy instruction, measure your students' progress, and lead them to make significant gains in their ability to read, write, and communicate.

The Building Blocks of Literacy

Chapter Three

- I. The Mystery of the Spoken and Written English Language
- II. Teaching the Building Blocks of Literacy Through Direct, Explicit, and Systematic Methods
- III. Bringing It All Together—A Research-Based Scope and Sequence

In the last chapter, we examined what students should know and be able to do at each grade level, as well as ways to assess and determine students’ current literacy abilities. In the remaining chapters, we will take an in-depth look at *how* to move your students toward reading and writing proficiency. As you’ll note from the literacy graphic below, reading involves both decoding and comprehending, two processes which are taught separately, yet work interdependently as we read. This chapter contains information about the building blocks of literacy that enable your students to decode, and thus, read independently. You probably remember from the introduction to this text that teaching children to decode is neither intuitive nor easy. This chapter, organized into three parts, explains the science behind effective decoding instruction and gives you the deep understanding necessary to teach your students, from Kindergarten to fifth grade, to read. Given how challenging it is to teach children to read, you might find this chapter to be particularly complex; you will likely want to return to it multiple times before and during the summer institute, and over the course of your teaching career.

Related Readings 📖

Along with this chapter, please read the following excerpt located in the Related Readings section at the end of this text:

- Put Reading First, pp. 7-26

In **Part I**, we will provide you with essential background knowledge about the construction of English speech and print; this information, while highly technical, will help you work more effectively with beginning and struggling readers.

In **Part II**, we will examine the first, and perhaps most crucial, component of literacy: the building blocks that are the underlying processes required for students to decode and read with fluency. We’ll take a look at the foundational reading skills within each building block and discuss the order in which to teach those skills. These building blocks include:

1. Book and print awareness
2. Phonological and phonemic awareness
3. Phonics and the alphabetic principle
4. Word and structural analysis

Decoding				Comprehension					
Book and Print Awareness	Phonological and Phonemic Awareness	Phonics and The Alphabetic Principle	Word and Structural Analysis	Fluency			Background Knowledge	Vocabulary	Comprehension Strategies
				Sight Words	Automaticity	Phrasing			

Additionally, we’ll turn our attention to some of the most effective and efficient research-based methods that you will use to deliver instruction in the building blocks of literacy.

In **Part III**, we will consider a research-based scope and sequence for instruction in the building blocks of literacy, Kindergarten through fifth grade. We’ll discover why certain sounds, letters, and spelling patterns are taught before others and will use our understanding of the spoken and written English language, gained in Part I, to inform our reading.

The Building Blocks of Literacy

You should note that in most districts, you will either have access to or be required to use a structured reading program. This chapter will not replace those programs by any means, but it will complement them. Most reading programs are written by highly skilled educators with extensive knowledge of the English language and of current research. Unfortunately, their teachers' manuals do not explain why the word study activities they require are effective or how they match the linguistic underpinnings of our language. We hope that this chapter will make it easier to see how your manual reflects (and occasionally, may fail to reflect) what is known about how English is constructed and how children learn the building blocks of literacy. This chapter will also show you how to assist students so far below grade level that the word study content of your program's lessons is effectively unintelligible to them.

I. The Mystery of the Spoken and Written English Language

George Bernard Shaw once ridiculed the English language by saying that you could spell *fish* GHOTI, using the *gh* in *rough*, the *o* in *women*, and the *ti* in *caution*. Some suggest that learning most English sound-symbol correspondences is folly, since so many rules that govern its use are often broken and sometimes contradictory. To the contrary, our language has many regular patterns that students can learn to help them be effective and efficient readers and spellers. If both phonological (sound) and morphological (meaning) spelling patterns are accounted for, **less than four percent of English words are "oddities."**²¹

To the novice teacher, however, these patterns are far from clear. Many Teach For America alumni remember with dread the first time they tried to explain why *time* has an *e* at the end or why *lady* is not pronounced /lādeē/ (as in *laddie*). It is because of these types of moments (that happen all too often) in the elementary classroom—when a student has confusion about sound-spelling relationships and the teacher is unable to respond effectively—that we are providing what may at first seem like more background information than you care to know about the English language. Consider the following:

- As a speaker of English, there is little need to know specific details of how to articulate various sounds.
- As a writer of English, you may occasionally refer to spelling conventions (such as “*i* before *e*, except after *c*”) but probably generally rely upon memory and constant repetition to cue spelling patterns.
- However, as teachers of spoken and written English, **our general knowledge of English will not suffice. To be precise in our assistance of students, we must have real knowledge of the construction of English speech and print.**

This section provides this critical background knowledge. In this section, we will demystify the spoken and written English Language for you so that you will have the expertise to appropriately diagnose any student's reading, spelling, or speaking error and provide appropriate corrective feedback. You will learn the **phonetics** (the oral articulation) of our phonemes (speech sounds) and the **alphabetic principle** (the connection between the sounds and letters in English).

²¹ Moats cites research by Hanna that 50% of English vocabulary could be spelled by a computer relying solely on sound-symbol correspondences, 36% spelled with only one error, and 10% more spelled correctly when accounting for morphology and etymology. (Moats, Louisa Cook. *Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2000, p. 97.)

Phonetics

In this section, we will consider some basic information about phonetics, the study of how speech sounds are produced.

It may surprise you that information about sound production is included in our literacy curriculum, since it may not seem to have an obvious connection to literacy. However, a characteristic of both beginning and struggling readers is that they often fail to hear and pronounce specific phonemes correctly. As a beginning or remedial reading teacher, you will need to help individual students overcome their difficulties in hearing the phonemes or help correct their pronunciation. Once you know the precise method of articulating these sounds, you will be able to provide explicit corrective feedback to improve students' phonological awareness and phoneme production.

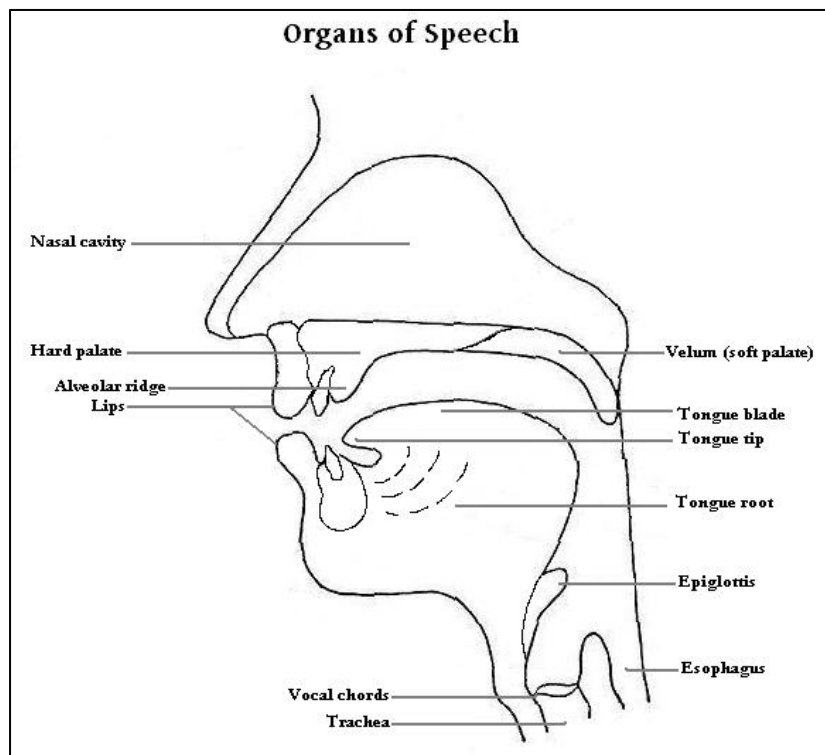
Throughout this section, we use linguistic terminology to describe the action of the speech organs, such as the tongue. This provides a common, specific language for us to discuss phonemes with your colleagues. However, use of this language will not provide any material benefit to your students. It is probably not very helpful to remind students to "make sure you articulate your unvoiced velar stop with the raising of the tongue on the velum instead of the hard palate!" For that reason, we will include simple language to use with your students, and notes for focusing your attention on students' production of sounds.

To understand phonetics, it is necessary to learn a little about anatomy. Effectively, speech production is about exhaling air. We inhale by lowering the diaphragm, a muscle group under the stomach. To speak, we raise the diaphragm and exhale slowly. We can pronounce most phonemes only when we exhale. (Try inhaling and reading this sentence aloud.)

When we exhale, the air is affected by several organs, shown in the diagram "Organs of Speech." When the air leaves the trachea, it passes through the **vocal chords**, two muscle strips in a sort of an oval. The round space between them is known as the glottis. When we constrict the vocal chords and pass air over them, we create **voiced** sounds. Not all sounds in English are voiced, so the vocal chords are not always used. (To sense this contrast, place your fingers to your throat and pronounce /f/. This sound is unvoiced. Repeat this process with /v/. This is a voiced sound. Can you feel the difference?)

Understanding Phonetics: Some Tips

As you read the Phonetics section, we suggest you try out the phonetic distinctions we identify. You may wish to watch your mouth in a mirror as you pronounce sounds, especially to see the articulation of phonemes that are difficult to feel. You will learn the linguistic terminology and phonetic concepts more readily if you practice the articulation of these sounds and discuss the material with other corps members using the technical terms. Throughout this section, we will provide many examples to help you better understand what happens when you speak.



The Building Blocks of Literacy

The air then enters the mouth, or sometimes the nasal cavity. Here, the tongue, palate (the roof of your mouth), teeth, lips, and jaw are critical parts. The tongue touches different parts of the palate to create different sounds. The bump of tissue behind the front teeth is called the *alveolar ridge* and behind that is the *hard palate*. Further back in the mouth is the soft palate, or *velum*. You can feel the difference between the hard palate and velum with your tongue.

Classroom Connection

Understanding how our mouths work as we pronounce sounds helps us to listen and watch our students more critically. In a room of children reading chorally, it's easy to spot those who cannot decode or articulate by the formation of their mouths.

In addition to thinking about which organs of speech are used in the production of various sounds, we also must consider another way that sounds are classified. This classification is very familiar to you—in fact, you have likely used these two categories for much of your life. We all know that English is comprised of **consonants and vowels**, but many of us may be unaware that this classification has nothing to do with the letter symbols per se, but instead what our speech organs do to produce the sound. Specifically, consonants are defined as those sounds where the air is blocked or constricted in some way, while vowels are those phonemes where the air is much less constricted. (Pronounce /b/ and /ē/, as in *beet*, and consider what happens to your airflow. When you articulate the consonant the air stream is blocked, but when you pronounce the vowel, it is not obstructed.) Let's begin by taking a closer look at the consonants.

Understanding the Consonants

English has 25 consonants that are separated into two broad types according to how the speech organs are used in their production; these categories are the **pairs** and the **groups**.²² Within each broad category (pairs and groups) several subcategories exist and are determined by what happens to your airflow as you produce the sound. The tables that follow describe the articulation of all the consonant phonemes in detail. For each phoneme, we will provide both its linguistic and simple name, describe how it is produced, and give example words to help you hear and feel these sounds as you produce them.

The Pairs of consonants are two consonants that are produced the same way, except that one is voiced and the other is not. Some of these are **stop pairs**, meaning that the production of the sound completely stops the flow of air through the mouth at some point.

Stop Pair	Linguistic Name	Description of Production	Simple Name ²³	Example Words
/p/ and /b/	bilabial stop	The lips are popped open with a puff of air. (Since this requires both lips, it's <i>bilabial</i> .)	lip popper	<i>pin, bin</i>
/t/ and /d/	alveolar stop	The tongue is tapped against the alveolar ridge.	tongue tapper	<i>tock, dock</i>
/k/ and /g/	velar stop	The tongue is pushed against the velum (soft palate) and released.	tongue scraper	<i>cold, gold</i>

The **fricative pairs**, as you may have guessed from their name, involve friction. Whereas the stop pairs require complete blockage of airflow, the fricatives only require that the air be substantially constricted. These can be pronounced continuously.

²² The pair and group terms come from Lindamood, P. & Lindamood. *The Lindamood-Bell Phoneme Sequencing Program for Reading, Spelling, and Speech: Teacher's Manual for the Classroom Clinic*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, 1998.

²³ These "simple names" also come from *The Lindamood-Bell Phoneme Sequencing (LiPS) Program*, designed to teach phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics to students with auditory processing difficulties using carefully focused, explicit activities. Information about LiPS materials and training is available at www.lindamoodbell.com.

Fricative Pair	Linguistic Name	Description of Production	Simple Name	Example Words
/f/ and /v/	labiodental fricative	The top teeth are placed on the bottom lip as you blow a stream of air. (Hence the name: “labio” for lip and “dental” for teeth.)	lip cooler ²⁴	<i>fan, van</i>
/th/ and / <u>th</u> / ²⁵	interdental fricative	The top teeth are rested on the tongue as you blow a stream of air.	tongue cooler	<i>cloth, clothe</i>
/s/ and /z/	alveolar fricative	The tongue is placed close to the alveolar ridge as you blow a stream of air. The lips are typically pushed out into a thin smile, although this is not necessary.	skinny air	<i>grace, graze</i>
/sh/ and /z <u>h</u> / ²⁶	alveopalatal fricative	The tongue is placed near the hard palate (roof of the mouth) behind the alveolar ridge while a stream of air is blown. The lips are typically pushed into a large circle, although this is not necessary.	fat air	<i>assure, azure</i>

There is only one **affricative pair**. This sound is produced when a stop is followed by a fricative sound.

Affricative Pair	Linguistic Name	Description of Production	Simple Name	Example Words
/ch/ and /j/	alveopalatal affricate	The air stream is stopped completely by placing the tongue behind the alveolar ridge. Then, the air is released with friction.	fat air pushed	<i>batch, badge</i>

While the technical language may be intimidating, pause here and force yourself to practice and feel the difference in your mouth. Try saying the /f/ in *fan*—can you feel your teeth against your lips, and the air continuing to stream out? That makes it a labiodental fricative, and your mouth works very differently to pronounce it than to produce the /p/ in *pan*. You’ll notice that the /p/ sound requires you to use both lips and involves a burst (rather than a continuous flow), so it’s a bilabial stop. Try using these terms to impress your friends and family the next chance you get.

The Groups of phonemes cannot be as easily distinguished as the pairs, but there is a clear logic to their grouping. The **nasals** include consonant phonemes that are produced by exhaling all of the air through your nose. All of the nasal sounds are voiced; you can feel the vibration of the vocal chords through the nose if you hold a finger beside your nose.

²⁴ Lindamood-Bell refers to this as a lip cooler because, if you wet the bottom lip, and pronounce /f/ or /v/, you feel cool air on your lip.

²⁵ /th/ and /th/ is the only pair of sounds represented by the same grapheme (*th*). In the remainder of this document, we will underline the voiced phoneme. Feel the difference by comparing the sounds at the end of *bath* and *bathe*.

²⁶ /zh/ is the only consonant phoneme that does not have its own grapheme, though we do hear it in a few English words, such as *vision* and *azure*.

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Nasal Phoneme	Linguistic Name	Description of Production	Simple Name	Example Word
/m/	front nasal	The lips create the air blockage, making a resonance chamber out of the entire mouth cavity.	front nose sound	<i>Rum</i>
/n/	middle nasal	The tongue blocks the air behind the teeth, right on the alveolar ridge, roughly in the same location as for /t/ and /d/.	middle nose sound	<i>Run</i>
/ng/ ²⁷	back nasal	The tongue is raised or pushed back onto the velum to block the air.	back nose sound	<i>Rung</i>

Want to be convinced that the air is coming through your nose? Try saying “mmm...” and plugging your nose at the same time.

The **glides** differ from all the above consonants in that they do not really obstruct the airflow in their production. In this sense, the glides have vowel-like qualities. The first three phonemes below are referred to as “wind sounds” because of the puff of air articulated for them.

Glide Phoneme	Linguistic Name	Description of Production	Simple Name	Example
/w/	bilabial (velarized) glide	The blade of the tongue arches toward the velum. The lips round as the sound is produced. It is voiced.	wind sound	<i>witch, wet</i>
/h/	glottal	The glottis (space between the vocal chords) is constricted to release only a thin puff of air. It is unvoiced.	wind sound	<i>hitch, hen</i>
/wh/	bilabial (velarized) glide	The blade of the tongue arches toward the velum. The lips round as the sound is produced. It is unvoiced.	wind sound	<i>which</i>
/y/	palatal glide	The tongue is pushed toward the palate as this sound is produced. It is voiced.	none	<i>yet, yen</i>

The **liquids** are “the most problematic speech sounds for English articulation, reading, and spelling...These are among the later developing sounds in the speech production of many children and the most difficult to teach in speech therapy because they ‘float’ in the mouth. The liquids have no clear beginning or end point in articulation.”²⁸ The sound is “smooth and flows easily.”²⁹ In English, /r/ is a particularly challenging phoneme. Its method of articulation differs widely depending on dialect and the location of the phoneme in a word. Because /r/ is similar to a vowel but has consonant characteristics, it is easily confused with other sounds. For example, some students replace /r/ with /w/. Try saying *rich* and *witch*. You will notice that the mouth formation is nearly identical; this makes it difficult to distinguish them.³⁰

²⁷ /ng/ is a single phoneme. It is not comprised of the phonemes /n/ and /g/ combined. The letters *n* and *g* are used to represent the phoneme because English has no individual letter to symbolize the velar nasal.

²⁸ Moats, Louisa Cook. *Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2000, p. 31.

²⁹ Akmajian, Adrian et al. *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001, p. 78.

³⁰ Students who confuse the /r/ sound with /w/ and other phonemes may have speech delays or disorders that cannot be remediated in the classroom. If you are concerned, discuss the problem with your special education resource teacher who will often be able to provide detailed advice.

Liquid Phoneme	Linguistic Name	Description of Production	Simple Name	Example
/l/	alveolar liquid	The blade of the tongue is raised toward the palate. The tip of the tongue touches the alveolar ridge.	front lifter	<i>led</i>
/r/	see below	The tongue is curled or bunched up behind the alveolar ridge. The lips are usually rounded.	back lifter ³¹	<i>red</i>

To review briefly, remember that the consonant sounds are separated into two categories. The **pairs** include sounds that are produced exactly the same way, except that one is voiced and the other is unvoiced. To feel the difference between voiced and unvoiced sounds, put your fingers against your vocal chords and say /b/ and /p/. You should feel the vibration for /b/ but not /p/. For a quick reminder, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 17: “Voiced and Unvoiced Consonants”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

- In the production of **stop pairs** (/b/ and /p/), the flow of air through the mouth stops.
- In the production of **fricative pairs** (/f/ and /v/) the airflow is constricted but continuous.
- The **affricative pair** (/ch/ and /j/) combines a stop with a fricative sound.

The **groups** are less easy to distinguish.

- **Nasal** phonemes (such as /m/) are produced when air is exhaled through the nose continuously.
- **Glides** (/w/) are unique consonants in that the consonant phoneme glides immediately into a vowel sound.
- **Liquid** phonemes (/l/ and /r/) are the most challenging consonants of all because there are both a lot of ways to move your tongue to articulate these sounds correctly and a lot of ways to move your tongue that result in incorrect pronunciation of these sounds.

Classroom Connection

Now that you know which consonant sounds are likely to be confused, you can be on the lookout for students who struggle to hear or articulate them. Help students to “feel” how sounds are different by thinking about the different speech organs that are used to make each one. Junie B. Jones, the beloved character from Barbara Park’s series for beginning readers, calls Valentine’s Day, “Valentimes Day” throughout her Kindergarten year. Perhaps Junie B.’s teacher should ask her to place her tongue behind her teeth to pronounce this holiday correctly.

When consonant phonemes are adjacent to one another within a syllable,³² the individual sounds are spoken together as **consonant blends** (two phonemes) or **consonant clusters** (three phonemes). The word *drive* has the consonant blend /dr/ at its beginning, while *lengths* ends with the consonant cluster /ngths/.

Not all consonants will blend together when they are adjacent because the rules of English phonology prevent this from happening. For example, /mt/ is not a blend, while /mp/ is. This is because /m/ and /p/ both use the lips in their production, while /t/ involves the tongue tapping the alveolar ridge. It is too difficult for the mouth to transition from /m/ to /t/, so we never use this combination. For a list of the most common consonant blends and clusters, refer again to the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 18: “Consonant Blends and Clusters”). ✖

Implications for Instruction of the Consonants

Now that we have examined how the sounds of individual consonants, blends, and clusters are articulated, we will consider the implications this knowledge has for classroom instruction. Once you begin teaching,

³¹ The names “front lifter” and “back lifter” refer to the position of the tongue in speech production. Try saying /l/ and /r/ in sequence. In both cases, the tongue is clearly “lifted.” You may also notice that the tongue slides backwards to produce /r/.

³² A syllable has one, and only one, vowel sound.

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you can refer to this section to get ideas about developing better articulation in your students, or to help identify the cause of students' reading, writing, and speaking errors that are not immediately explicable. Though we will explain particular articulation problems and describe several solutions, we will not explain when and how to teach consonants, as that will be the subject of Parts II and III.

As a teacher of beginning and/or struggling readers, you must help students learn and remember sounds by describing and drawing attention to what is happening in their mouths when they produce phonemes. Here are some suggestions for teaching new sounds or improving articulation:

- **Describe the articulation.** Draw attention to the location and use of the lips, the tongue, the teeth, and the jaw—whichever are relevant to the production of a particular sound. Use the descriptions above to help you.
- **Help students to feel the sounds.** Tell students to pay attention to what they feel in their mouths and their throats. To explain voicing, have students contrast /f/ and /v/. Have students feel the side of the nose to identify nasals. Have students place their hands in front of their mouths to feel the quality of the air. For example, /s/ will bring a stream of air, /j/ a puff.
- **Use your hands to demonstrate.** Curve your fingertips to simulate teeth and show student the side, such that your hand simulates the profile of the mouth. Use the other hand to be the teeth. You can demonstrate the /t/ by tapping your “tongue” fingers behind the “teeth” fingers.
- **Examine the mouth.** You can draw students' attention to the action of your own mouth. You can also provide them with mirrors and allow them to see for themselves how their mouths are working. (Use of mirrors is not necessary for most students and works best in small groups. It is not advisable as part of whole-group instruction.)

Even with guidance on how to pronounce sounds, some students may still confuse some of the consonant phonemes. If you are aware of some of the most common areas of confusion, you will be better prepared to identify the cause of student error and provide the necessary corrective feedback. For more information on correcting student errors, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 19-20: “Identifying and Correcting Errors in Students' Sound Production”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

For English Learners, one major challenge is that some English sounds do not appear in their first language. For example, for students whose first language is Spanish, the differences between /sh/ and /ch/ present difficulty because /sh/ is not a Spanish phoneme. To assist these students, show them the proper articulation of the different sounds. Demonstrate the use of the diaphragm in /ch/ to create a puff of air (have students feel this by placing their hands in front of their mouths) and contrast this with the stream of air produced for /sh/. To compare elements of English with several other languages, see the online **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 21: “Contrastive Analysis Chart”). ✖

Although it is important and helpful to teach students learning English proper articulation of sounds, it is not necessary to highlight all student errors that might be associated with learning English. For example, beginning English learners tend to pronounce an *s* at the beginning of a word as /es/. (They might say /estop/ instead of /stop/.) While it is useful to bring this to students' attention, do not dwell on this point. As long as the addition of the /e/ phoneme does not impede communication, it is not a major concern. After all, the primary purpose of literacy instruction is to make students good readers. If their speech does not impede this goal, it is usually unnecessary to change it.

Even some native speakers of English do not pronounce consonants according to the descriptions above. For example, speakers in New England tend to eliminate the pronunciation of /r/ following a vowel (so /car/ sounds like /cah/). If a student consistently pronounces some consonants in a way that differs somewhat from your own pronunciation, you need to judge whether or not the child is following a dialectical pattern or has a speech difficulty. In cases like the example above, it is not necessary to attempt to change the child's pronunciation, though it is important to model and draw attention to the correct articulation of sounds.

In this section, we have considered how consonant sounds are produced, a few of the difficulties that some beginning and struggling readers have in articulating those sounds, and the ways in which we can draw students' attention to specific mouth movements to help them overcome those struggles. We will now shift our focus to the vowel phonemes and follow a similar pattern in investigating their production and the articulation challenges that they pose to students.

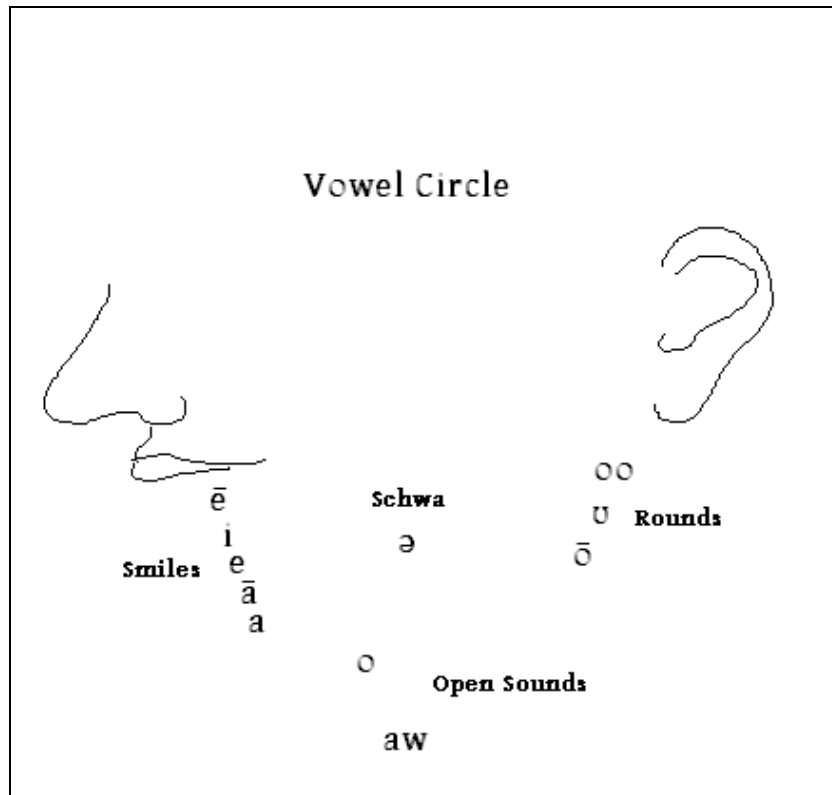
Understanding the Vowels

As was stated earlier, vowels are open sounds, meaning that the airflow is never completely obstructed by the tongue when pronouncing these sounds. While the air channel widens and narrows, producing the range of possible vowels, the tongue never touches the palate. Although the consonant fricatives, like the vowels, never completely obstruct the air, they compress it and redirect it to create sound. The vowels merely adjust the width of the air channel to make different sounds.

The vowels are harder to learn than most of the consonants because they are harder to define in terms of the movement of the tongue, lips, and teeth. The distinctions between many vowels are very fine, making it difficult for students to distinguish them. The definition of each vowel requires careful attention to the location of the tongue, the jaw, and the lips. To help understand these phonemes, consider the **vowel circle** pictured here.

In this graphic, you see the vowels in four groups: the **smiles** (the /ē/ in *speak*), **open** sounds (the /aw/ in *saw*), **rounds** (the /ō/ in *rope*), and **schwa** (the /uh/ in *attend*). Their placement in the graphic corresponds to the location of the tongue and the shape of the lips when articulating each sound.

Let's consider first the location of the tongue during vowel production. In pronouncing /ē/ as in *meet*, the tongue is raised so that it nearly touches the hard palate. The /aw/ sound in *hawk* is located lowest on the graphic because the tongue (with the jaw) is lowered significantly to produce this sound. So, we show the /aw/ sound at the bottom of the circle to indicate that the tongue is far from the hard palate.



The Building Blocks of Literacy

To investigate how your tongue, jaw, and lips move when you pronounce different vowel phonemes, try the following exercises. Place your hand under your chin and pronounce the vowels on the left side. They are the vowels heard in the words *beet*, *bit*, *bet*, *bake*, and *bat*. You will probably notice that your chin continues to fall with each vowel you pronounce.

Now, pronounce /o/ (the vowel in *pot*) and /aw/ (the vowel in *law*). If you have trouble feeling a difference, note that the /o/ is similar to the sound made when doctors ask patients to “open up and say /o/.”

In addition to your jaw moving as you produce each vowel sound, your tongue and lips adjust as well. With the seven vowels on the left, the tongue is generally forward, that is flattened out under the hard palate. With the three vowels on the right, the tongue is pushed into the back of the mouth. For example, the long /oo/ sound (as in *cool*) is produced by raising the tongue and pushing it to the back of the mouth. The /ō/ sound (as in *wrote*) still requires the tongue be pushed to the back of the mouth, but it is lowered away from the velum.

Classroom Connection

The schwa sound, which sounds like /uh/, can cause a great deal of confusion for students attempting to decode multi-syllable words. We teach students attempting to read multi-syllable words that any unstressed vowel can represent the schwa sound. Once they know this, decoding these complex words becomes easier.

The vowels are also grouped into three broad categories according to the shape of the lips in their production. Generally, the lips spread into a smile to pronounce the first five vowels on the left of the graphic. The lips are fairly wide open and oval-shaped when pronouncing /o/ and /aw/. In fact, no other vowel sounds require a more open mouth. The lips make a smaller circular shape when producing the three back vowels. While it is not absolutely necessary to shape the lips according to the three categories, it is generally the case.

Notice that the schwa sound, identified by the upside down and backward *e*, is between all of the sounds. This is because the tongue is in the middle of the mouth when pronouncing this sound. The schwa sound is the unstressed vowel sound that we often hear in multi-syllable words.³³ For example, in the word *lesson*, the *o* makes the schwa sound /uh/. Other words that contain this sound include *about*, *elect*, and *nation*.

You may notice that the vowel circle does not include several sounds, such as the /ow/ in *mouse*. This is one of the English **diphthongs**. Diphthongs are sounds produced when the mouth moves from one formation to another within a single syllable. If you say /ow/ slowly, you will notice your mouth begins open, like the /o/ sound, and clearly and rapidly moves to end in another shape, a circle. This makes /ow/ a diphthong. The diphthongs are:

Sound	Example Word	Mouth Movement
/ɪ/	write	Open to Smile
/ɪ̯/	cute	Smile to Round
/ow/	brown	Open to Round
/oi/	coin	Round to Smile

If we combine the vowel phonemes on the vowel circle with the diphthongs, there are only fifteen vowels in English. However, they remain challenging for learners to distinguish and are made more difficult because English has so many spellings for each vowel. For the /ō/ phoneme alone, there are five fairly common spellings!

As you learned in the consonants section above, the liquid /r/ presents a significant challenge because of its vowel-like qualities. It creates even more confusion when it follows vowels. When /r/ follows the letters *e*, *i*, and *u*, the grapheme makes the sound /er/ as in *mother*. /er/ is not the same as /e/ and /r/

³³ Beers, Kylene. *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003, p. 239.

fused together but is its own phoneme because the two sounds blend together. The *er*, *ir*, and *ur* spellings of /er/ are essentially arbitrary since there is really only one sound. English has two other r-controlled vowels, /or/ (as in *more*) and /ar/ (as in *far*). Because /r/ has “taken over” the vowel, these are referred to as **r-controlled vowels**.

Classroom Connection

Sometimes, teachers refer to the r-controlled vowels as “bossy Rs” because the /r/ is “telling the vowel to change its sound.” This is a useful mnemonic.

To review the distinguishing characteristics of the vowel phonemes, take another look at the vowel circle and remember that these sounds are sorted into four broad groups—**smiles, open, rounds, and schwa**—because of the movement of the tongue (in the front, middle, or back of the mouth) and the shape of the lips (spread into a smile, open in an oval shape, or small and rounded) during production of the sound. Some vowel sounds do not fit neatly into the categories represented on the vowel circle. The **diphthongs** are vowel sounds (/ī/, /ū/, /ow/ and /oi/) that involve the mouth moving from one shape to another. Finally, when the consonant *r* follows a vowel, that vowel becomes **r-controlled** and makes the /er/ sound, regardless of its spelling.

Implications for Instruction of the Vowels

As you have seen, vowels are complex sounds that are easily confused or forgotten by students. It is likely that you will spend more time correcting students’ errors with vowels than with consonants. This section gives you further information about the other features of vowels that will be important in teaching and correcting students.

Long and Short Vowels: By convention, vowels have been separated into two broad categories in elementary school instruction: the long vowels and the short vowels. You will hear the long vowels (/ā, ē, ī, ō, ū/) as you say the words *make*, *meek*, *might*, *moat*, and *mute*. The short vowels (/ă, ě, ĭ, ǒ, ŭ/) are heard in *mat*, *met*, *mitt*, *mop*, and *mutt*. While these distinctions retain a kernel of meaning (the long vowels are generally articulated for a slightly longer duration than the short vowels), you would be hard pressed to find many who can readily distinguish the length of these distinctions, only measurable in milliseconds. As a result, this distinction between the long and short vowels is effectively meaningless.

However, this does not mean you should eliminate or replace this language in your instruction. There are several reasons for this. First, the short vowels are similar in that they all require only one letter to spell the phoneme and that there are very few spellings for each short vowel.³⁴ Second, the long vowels are similar in that they all “say the name” of the letter they represent.³⁵ (Say *hope* and listen to the *o* say its letter name.) Third, the long and short monikers are deeply ingrained in school and teacher culture and, thus, student consciousness. There is no compelling reason to eliminate the use of the labels, since they can function as useful terms for categories of sounds that students will encounter thousands of times throughout school. It serves them well if you continue to use terms they already know and send them to the next grade with this knowledge, to teachers who will likely use these labels as well.

Identifying and Correcting Articulation of the Vowels: As with the consonants, the linguistic concepts presented here are useful as you help your students properly articulate sounds. For beginning readers and those students who do have difficulty articulating their vowels, several tips are helpful.

³⁴ For these reasons, the short vowels are typically taught first in most phonics programs.

³⁵ This is a broad generalization we will explore in greater detail in discussing phonics rules and patterns.

The Building Blocks of Literacy

- Refer to the action of the lips and the lowering of the tongue (or, more visibly, the jaw) to help students learn the distinctions between the vowels.
- Have students contrast vowels that are very different to help them see the proper mouth formation for a particular vowel. /ē/ as in *meet*, /aw/ as in *law*, and long /oo/ as in *tooth* are the most distinctive vowels. Contrasting other vowels with these is helpful.
- Have students pronounce the vowels in groups, according to the vowel circle. The LiPS program relies on the three distinctions of lip formation: smile, open, and round, to help students categorize the sounds.³⁶ You might also try the following with students who need more support than your reading program can provide (this should be a very small minority of students). Print all of the sounds with their most common letters on cards, pronounce them for the student, and have the student sort the cards according to mouth formation. Students can use the memory of the categories to remember the articulation of some of the sounds. This alone will not remedy the problem, but combining this with some of the other suggestions here may produce proper pronunciation.
- As with the consonants, using a mirror to see proper articulation can be very helpful.

Classroom Connection

Because we can spell our short vowel sounds with only one letter, we teach these sounds to beginning readers first. The complex patterns that represent our long vowel sounds are taught after students have the simple short vowel sounds under their belts.

Vowels for English Language Learners: Research shows that learning vowels is especially challenging for English Language Learners. You will certainly teach these students phonics, but it will probably also be necessary for you to explicitly explain the pronunciation of some of the vowels that are not present in the learner's heritage language or which differ somewhat in pronunciation. In Spanish, for example, there are only five vowel sounds as compared with more than fifteen in English, making the articulation of some English vowels very challenging for these students. Use the same techniques you would use with other students struggling with pronunciation. Refer to the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 21: "Contrastive Analysis Chart") to know which vowels are likely to require the most explanation for the students you are teaching; this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

Classroom Connection

Teachers of English Language Learners need this linguistic background knowledge because it helps us to structure our phonemic awareness instruction. If we know that Spanish has far fewer vowel sounds than English, we can anticipate that our ELL students will need more explicit instruction and guidance in hearing and articulating the slight distinctions that separate the many English vowel sounds from each other.

Word Length: The length of a word and the number of syllables makes it easier or more difficult to pronounce. All of the words listed in the chart below are one-syllable words, but they become more difficult to say as the number of consonants grows and blends or clusters are used. The simple syllables contain neither blends nor clusters; the complex syllable is defined by the presence of a blend or a cluster. The notation for syllable patterns uses *v* to indicate a vowel sound and *c* to indicate a consonant.

³⁶ www.lindamoodbell.com, accessed 7/10/2010.

Syllable Pattern	Simple or Complex?	Examples
vc	simple	/it, an, thō/
cv	simple	/hē, mī, thā/
cvc	simple	/ship, bēt, kōn/
ccv	complex	/thrō, bloo/
vcc	complex	/its, aft/
ccvc	complex	/truk, fling/
cvcc	complex	/camp, bunt/
ccvcc	complex	/shrēks, smasht/
cccvc	complex	/skwish/
cvccc	complex	/fenst/
cccvcc	complex	/splits/
ccvccc	complex	/flangks/
cccvccc	complex	/strengths/

It can be very difficult to pronounce highly complex one-syllable words. Words with multiple syllables that are simple may be easier to say than words with one syllable that have many sounds. For example, the two-syllable word *maker* has only four spoken sounds, whereas the one-syllable word *scrimps* has seven. For most students, *maker* will be easier to say than *scrimps*.

The Alphabetic Principle

English phonetics is complex, but no more complex than the phonetics of other languages. Unfortunately, the alphabetic principle (the connection between alphabet letters and Sounds) in English is more complex than the phonics systems of many other languages.

Why is this so? Invasions of England had a profound effect on the development of the English language. Briefly, it happened this way. The Celts lived in England and were invaded by Germanic tribes, who brought with them a West German language. These conquering tribes assimilated some Celtic words and the Latin script (our 26 Roman letters) into their language, giving birth to what is known as Anglo-Saxon, or Old English. The Anglo-Saxon language was very simple; it contained very functional words (those for animals, work, and numbers, for instance) and included most of our high-frequency words, such as *to*, *the*, *you*, and *would*.³⁷ Further, the Anglo-Saxon language provided us with most of our consonant and vowel sound-symbol correspondences.³⁸

Later, the Norman Conquest of England brought with it the language of nobles, and the result was the assimilation of many French words into English. Those words typically retained their French spellings, creating words like *glorious* and *situation*, the spelling of which does not match the conventions of English phonics. Finally, during the Renaissance, an interest in classical Roman and Greek culture, art, and literature helped to assimilate some Greek words (those still used in science, mathematics, and philosophy).³⁹

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Rather than moving lockstep through the alphabet, teaching all the ways to spell each sound, we are strategic about when we introduce particular spellings. By teaching the most commonly used spellings first, we expand the number of words that our beginning readers can decode and read independently.

³⁷ Moats, Louisa Cook. *Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2000, p. 85.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid p. 89.

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English has 25 consonant sounds and 18 vowel sounds, if you count all of the r-controlled vowels and diphthongs separately, for a total of 43 phonemes. Obviously, our 26 individual alphabetic letters are not enough to spell these phonemes, so we combine letters to represent some consonant sounds and many vowel sounds. Because English has layers of language from so many places, there are more than 250 spellings, known as graphemes, for these phonemes.⁴⁰ A grapheme is a letter (or letters) that spells a sound. For example, the most common grapheme for /ch/ is *ch* while one grapheme for /i/ is *igh* as in *high*. Some graphemes are common and used frequently but others, like *ough* are much less common. Some graphemes like *ough*, represent many phonemes, as you may remember from the poem in the introduction to this book; think of *dough* versus *through*.

Given the broad range of letters that are used to spell our sounds, it may seem Horace Mann was right to have argued that children should not learn the complex structure of English phonics. To the contrary, extensive research has shown that children benefit from learning phonics, so long as it is taught carefully and clearly. While there are many graphemes, English is a language composed of many reliable patterns.

In this section, you will learn some basic patterns of English phonics. We do not refer to these as rules because the complexity of our phonics system requires flexibility to account for the overlap between different patterns. Unlike rules, our patterns are flexible, but they are generally reliable. Remember that this section intends to give you the detailed information that *you* need to understand fully the key spelling patterns that govern the written English language. You should not feel compelled to explain these patterns to children in ways that reflect your adult understanding of them. We will discuss the specifics of how and when to teach your students the alphabetic principle and phonics in Parts II and III.

Important Spelling Patterns

None of us learned to read or spell by memorizing the multitude of spelling patterns that exist in the English language. However, as literacy teachers, it is helpful for us to have an understanding of these spelling patterns and what influences them. The different ways that we spell sounds are influenced by:

- (1) **Predictable and invariant sound-spelling relationships**
- (2) **The position (beginning, middle, or end) of a sound in a word**
- (3) **What surrounds the sound**
- (4) **Location of a sound within a syllable**
- (5) **Common English conventions**
- (6) **Language of origin**
- (7) **Morphological structure (the way in which English spelling often preserves and represents the meaning of a word part)⁴¹**

We will describe each of these influences in turn and examine many spelling patterns that serve as examples. As you read, keep in mind that these are not rules, but patterns that are flexible but generally reliable.

(1) Predictable and Invariant Sound-Spelling Relationships. In the English language, there are very few sound-spelling relationships that are predictable and invariant. Many sounds can be spelled in multiple ways, and some graphemes (letters or letter combinations) can represent more than one sound. Consider all of the ways that the /k/ sound can be spelled (kind, cross, luck, choir, and talk to name a few) or the

⁴⁰ Moats, Louisa Cook. *Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2000, p. 90.

⁴¹ Adapted from Moats, Louisa Cook. *Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2000.

sounds that the letter *g* can represent (/j/ in *geranium* and /g/ in *gallon*). The few sound-spelling relationships that are constant include:

- /p/ spelled with the letter *p*, as in *purple*, *spot*, and *trip*,
- /b/ spelled with the letter *b*, as in *beautiful*, *brick*, and *tub*
- /wh/ spelled with the letters *wh*, as in *white*, *when*, and *which*
- /th/ (unvoiced) spelled with the letters *th*, as in *thing* and *breath*
- /th/ (voiced) spelled with the letters *th*, as in *this* and *breathe*

Except for these few, the spelling of most sounds is dependent on one of the remaining six factors. Before we examine these factors however, we must make one note about the complicated matter of long vowels. These vowel sounds are much more challenging than their “short” counterparts, as there are so many different ways to spell one long vowel sound (for instance, both /ā/ and /ē/ -as in *make* and *meet*- have **eight** fairly common spellings). The long vowels are made more complicated by the fact that the most appropriate spelling *cannot be determined* by spelling pattern. For example, there is no way to know whether the word /blēk/ should be spelled *bleek*, *bleak*, or *bleke*. Despite the difficulty in pinpointing exact spellings, there are some conventions that can be very helpful in eliminating inappropriate spellings and narrowing the list of options. We will consider those conventions as we look at the six factors that influence spelling patterns.

(2) Position of the Sound in a Word. The position of the sound in a word can determine its spelling.

- **Consonant borrowers:**⁴² Several consonant letters, referred to as consonant borrowers, were never accounted for in our discussion of phonetics because they do not have their own sounds. Rather, the sound they represent depends on their position in a word, or the sounds that surround them. QU, X, and Y are examples⁴³.

Letter	Pattern	Example Words
QU ⁴⁴	QU says /kw/ at the beginning or in the middle of a word.	quiet, squish, inquest
	QUE says /k/ in the middle or at the end of a word.	grotesque
	IQUE says /k/ in the middle or at the end of a word.	antique
X	X says /z/ at the beginning of a word.	xylophone
	X says /gz/ in the middle of a word.	exit, anxiety
	X says /ks/ in the middle and at the end of a word.	waxy, fox
Y	Y says /y/ at the beginning of a word.	yes
	Y says /i/ in the middle of a word (with words of Greek origin).	gym, mystery
	Y says /i/ at the end of a one-syllable word.	fly, dry
	Y says /ē/ at the end of a multi-syllable word.	funny, quickly

- **Vowel friends:** Three of the long vowel sounds, /ā/, /ē/, and /ō/, (as in *pail*, *seat*, and *coat*) have predictable spelling patterns when they are spelled with two adjacent vowels. This is the basis for the familiar old phonics rule, “when two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking.” While this phonics rule has fallen into disfavor, owing to the many spellings that violate it (*lion*, *meow*, *coil*, and *George*, for example), it is true with these vowel patterns in particular. Knowing that “two vowels go walking” is helpful for reading, but the vowel friends also have a pattern that helps spelling. The spellings of the vowel friends differ depending on their location in a word.⁴⁵

⁴² The term “borrowers” comes from Lindamood-Bell.

⁴³ Y is a borrower, in addition to having its own sound.

⁴⁴ The letter Q never stands alone in a word; it is always paired with U to make the grapheme QU.

⁴⁵ The “vowel friends” pattern requires a few notes. First, the *ey* spelling at the end of a word is somewhat uncommon, as *yi* is often used instead (see the “consonant borrower” table above). Second, *ea* and *ey* sometimes

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Sound	Beginning or Middle Spelling	Example Words	End Spelling	Example Word
/ā/	<i>ai</i>	air, pail	<i>_ay</i>	play
/ē/	<i>ea</i>	each, seat	<i>-ey</i>	key
/ō/	<i>oa</i>	oat, coal	<i>ow</i>	glow

- **Other vowels:** Although their patterns are not identical to the vowel friends, the phonemes /aw/, /oi/, and /ow/ have a spelling convention that reflects their location in a word.⁴⁶

Sound	Beginning or Middle Spelling	Example Words	End Spelling	Example Words
/aw/	<i>au</i>	<i>audience, launch</i>	<i>aw</i>	paw, claw
/oi/	<i>oi</i>	<i>oil, coin</i>	<i>oy</i>	toy, employ
/ow/	<i>ou</i>	<i>outside, loud</i>	<i>ow</i>	brow, now

(3) What Surrounds the Sound. The sounds that surround a particular sound can influence its spelling.

- **Consonant Borrowers:**⁴⁷ While the spelling of some consonant borrowers depends on the location of the consonant in the word, the spelling of two others, C and G, depends on the letters that surround them.

Letter	Pattern	Example Words
C	C says /k/ before <i>a, o, u</i> , or any consonant (besides <i>h</i>).	crash, cat, coat, cut
	C says /s/ before <i>e, i</i> , or <i>y</i> .	rice, circle, cycle
G	G says /g/ before <i>a, o, u</i> , or any consonant.	gab, gone, gust
	G says /j/ before <i>e, i</i> , or <i>y</i> .	gentle, giant, gym

- **Short Vowel-Consonant Patterns:** It is sometimes said that short vowels are “weak” because they can easily “lose” their sounds. This is to say that they can be affected by vowels that follow in close proximity. For example, the word *pan* is pronounced /pan/. If you place an *e* at the end of the word, it must be pronounced /pān/. The short vowel /a/ has “lost” its sound and has become a long vowel.

Since short vowels are prone to “losing” their sounds, they must be sheltered from the influence of subsequent vowels. This leads to several spelling patterns. Some sounds that follow short vowels try to protect the short vowel.

represent the /ā/ sound (as in *they*, for example), although this is less common than the /ē/ pronunciation. Finally, in addition to representing the /ō/ sound at the end of a word, *ow* is also a spelling of the /ow/ sound, as in *brown*.

⁴⁶ It is important to note that the *aw* and *ow* spellings of /aw/ and /ow/ also appear when those sounds are followed by the sounds /l/ and /n/, as in *lawn, crawl, brown, and fowl*. The *ow* spelling of /ow/ is also used when the sound is followed by /er/, as in *flower, shower, and power*.

⁴⁷ The term “borrowers” comes from Lindamood-Bell.

Pattern Name	Description	Example Words
k and ck	When /k/ follows a short vowel, it is spelled <i>ck</i> . When /k/ follows any other vowel, it is spelled <i>k</i> .	back, stick brook, lake
dge and ge	When /j/ follows a short vowel, it is spelled <i>dge</i> . When /j/ follows any other vowel, it is spelled <i>ge</i> .	badge, smudge rage, stooge
tch and ch	When /ch/ follows a short vowel, it is spelled <i>tch</i> . When /ch/ follows any other vowel, it is spelled <i>ch</i> .	batch, witch beach, couch
Floss + zz	When /f/, /l/, /s/, or /z/ follows a short vowel, the letter doubles. When /f/ and /l/ follow any other vowel they remain single letters. When /s/ and /z/ follow any other vowel, they are spelled <i>se</i> and <i>ze</i> respectively	cuff, fill, grass, jazz leaf, spool house, gauze
Doubling Rule	This rule is used when adding a suffix that begins with a vowel. If a single consonant follows a short vowel in a one-syllable word, that consonant is doubled.	run → running fit → fitted win → winner
Change y to i	This rule is used when adding a suffix to a word that ends in consonant <i>y</i> . Before adding the suffix, change <i>y</i> to <i>i</i> , except when adding <i>-ing</i> (<i>crying</i>).	beauty → beautiful happy → happiest write → writing
Drop silent e	This rule is used when adding a suffix that begins with a vowel to a word that ends in silent <i>e</i> . Before adding the suffix, drop the silent <i>e</i> .	make → making wave → waved drive → driving

- Vowel-Consonant-E (Silent e):** Silent E is the most common long vowel spelling (besides the vowel alone, discussed in the subsection “Syllable Types”).⁴⁸ The silent E spelling refers to those spellings of the long vowels in which the long vowel letter is followed by a consonant and then the letter E. Examples include: *make*, *athlete*, *bite*, *note*, and *cute*. Adults often refer to this pattern as a “vowel consonant e” spelling.
- Past Tense Pronunciation:** The regular past tense is always spelled *-ed*. However, the past tense can be pronounced three ways, /t/, /d/, and /ɪd/, depending on the final sound in the base word. The following table outlines the correct pronunciation in all circumstances:

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Teachers often explain this pattern as **bopper e** (the *e* bops the short vowel on the head and tells it to say its name, **magic e** (the *e* magically changes the sound of the short vowel and makes it say its name), or **vowel blank e** (students are taught to associate the entire group of letters with the spelling and remember it as a unit).

Final Phoneme in Base Word is:	Past Tense is Pronounced:	Example Words
unvoiced	/t/	watched, shipped
voiced	/d/	climbed, owed, dragged
/t/ or /d/	/ɪd/ ⁴⁹	needed, wanted

⁴⁸ The one exception to this is that the *e_e* spelling of /ē/ is less common than the *ee* spelling.

⁴⁹ Many teachers say that the final sound is actually /ed/. While phonologically the pronunciation is /ɪd/, /ed/ is close enough not to confuse students, and it has the added benefit of matching the graphemes also.

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- **Pronunciation of Plurals:** Plurals are similar to the past tense. They are written with *s* or *es* at the end of the word, and are pronounced /s/, /z/, or /iz/, according to the following rule:

Final Phoneme in Base Word is:	Plural is Pronounced:	Example
unvoiced	/s/	sticks, bats, caps
voiced	/z/	shoes, waves, bags
/s/, /z/, /sh/, /zh/, /ch/, /j/	/iz/ ⁵⁰	classes, mazes, wishes, garages, batches, judges

(4) Location of the Sound within a Syllable: Syllables are easily defined: they have one, and only one, vowel sound. Syllables are useful to readers and spellers because they help us to separate long, complex words into comprehensible parts.

- **Syllable Types:** Syllables can be examined by type, and the type of syllable helps us to determine the correct pronunciation of vowel sounds. In the notation below, *v* indicates a vowel and *c* indicates a consonant.

Syllable Type	Notation	Description	Vowel Sound	Example Words
Closed	vc	The vowel is in the beginning or middle of the syllable; the consonant is at the end.	short sound	bun, it, send, bat, cop ⁵¹
Open	cv	The vowel is at the end of the syllable (leaving it “open”); the consonant precedes it.	long sound	mū (as in music), hō (hotel), tā (table), bī (binary), mē (medium), cy (as infancy)
R-Controlled	vr	Vowels followed by <i>r</i>	r-controlled sound	fir, car, her, more, burn
Silent E	vcE	These contain a vowel, followed by a consonant and the letter e, as described previously.	long sound	bone, bite, sane, mule, theme
Digraph	vv	These contain two contiguous vowels with one sound. These include the vowel friends, the spellings of /aw/ and other vowel spellings.	varies by digraph	lawn, pain, cease, tow, -ceive (as in receive), chief
Diphthong	vv	Syllables containing the diphthongs /oi/ and /ow/	/oi/ or /ow/	coil, town, ploy, mouse
Consonant LE	cLE	Syllables that contain only a consonant followed by the letters LE	the /e/ says the schwa sound (/uh/) followed by /l/	ble, dle, fle, gle, kle, ple, sle (often spelled stle), tle, zle

⁵⁰ Teachers sometimes tell their students that *es* actually says /ez/ or /es/. /ez/ is probably appropriate, considering the minimal contrast between /e/ and /i/. However, the difference in voicing between /s/ and /z/ is distinct, and we do not advise you take this shortcut.

⁵¹ Most of these examples are also real words. However, the individual syllables are typically not real words.

- **Syllable Division:** There are several main ways to break words into syllables. Note that the following rules are designed to produce the correct vowel sounds, not to match pronunciation exactly. For example, *follow* has only one /l/ sound in its pronunciation, although we visually divide it between the two consonants to make the first syllable a closed syllable.

Type	Description	Example
vc.cv	This is the most common, widely taught division. This creates a closed first syllable.	rab.bit, mar.ker, pub.lish
v.cv	When only a single consonant falls between two vowels, it is most commonly divided this way, making an open first syllable	tu.lip, la.bel, o.mit, cra.zy
vc.v	This is a less common way to divide when a single consonant falls between two vowels.	cab.in, pun.ish, drag.on
v.cLE	When the second syllable contains the cLE syllable type, divide before the consonant.	sta.ble, ,ma.ple. bu.gle
v.v	This occurs when two adjacent vowels are in separate syllables. Usually, this occurs when two adjacent vowels do not form a vowel team (i.e., ne.on). It is trickier with words like Se.at.tle or po.et, where the vowels might make a vowel team (<i>ea</i> and <i>oe</i> respectively)	li.on, bi.on.ic, re.al.it.y

(5) Common English Conventions. When the phonemes /s/, /or/, and /v/ are heard at the end of a word, the spellings for those phonemes are almost always followed by a silent *e*, whether or not the *e* is needed to create a long vowel sound. Each spelling has a different rule, as follows:

Phoneme	Spelling	Reason	Example
/s/	<i>se</i>	The <i>e</i> is needed after the <i>s</i> to distinguish words ending with a plural from words that merely end with the /s/ sound.	rose, mouse, lease, dense
/or/	<i>ore</i>	In English, /or/ is almost never spelled <i>or</i> at the end of a one-syllable word. Only <i>or</i> , <i>nor</i> , and <i>for</i> are spelled this way. Most others are spelled <i>ore</i> . There is no reason for this. It is merely a convention of English spelling.	more, store, lore
/v/	<i>ve</i>	In English, no word can end with the grapheme <i>v</i> . Only <i>rev</i> , which derives from <i>revolution</i> , is an exception. As with /or/, this is merely a convention of English spelling.	have, give, live, stave

(6) Language of Origin. As you have learned, many other languages have impacted the English language. The language of origin helps readers understand certain spelling patterns that seem to violate more predictable patterns. Without an understanding of the influence of the Greek language, it would be difficult to explain why the /s/ sound at the beginning of *psychology* is spelled *ps* and the next sound (/i/) is spelled *y*. Similarly, not understanding the assimilation of French words into our language would make it challenging to explain why the *ch* in *charade* represents the /sh/ sound and not the /ch/ sound as our English phonology would suggest. Finally, though this information is not helpful to spellers, it is interesting to note that all 100 of the most frequently used words in the English

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Instruction in high frequency words is critical to effective reading instruction. Because we *can't* decode many of these words, but find them in practically every sentence we read, we have to be able to identify them instantly. To do this, teachers post these words on "word walls," give students flash cards to help them practice at home, and quiz them regularly to assess their ability to read them automatically.

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language are of Anglo-Saxon origin.⁵² Many of these high frequency words are indecipherable by examining patterns, but rather we must memorize their spelling and be able to read them on sight.

(7) Morphological Structure. Morphemes are the smallest meaningful units in written language. A morpheme can be a whole word (such as *beauty*) if it can stand on its own and be meaningful, or it can be only part of a word (such as *-ful* in *beautiful*) if it must be combined with another morpheme to convey meaning. Having an understanding of morphemes helps us in three basic ways. First, we are able to determine what a word means if we can break it down and examine its component parts. Readers who know that the Greek root *hydro* means water will be better equipped to figure out what happens to a car when it *hydroplanes*. The process of examining morphemes to determine a word's meaning will be addressed in chapter six.

Understanding morphemes serves another purpose; if we understand how morphemes work, we are able to break down long, complex words (like *subterranean*, *sophistry*, or *dictatorship*) into chunks that help us to decode, even if we are not quite sure of each chunk's meaning.

Finally, knowing about morphology helps us to spell. Most often in the English language, spelling preserves and visually represents the meaning of a word (consider how the spelling of *signature* preserves the meaning of *sign*, or how *magician* relates to *magic*.)⁵³ As you may suspect, some of the spelling patterns that we have already discussed could also be classified as being influenced by morphological structure. For example, the doubling rule and the guidelines for pronunciation of past tense and plurals are influenced by what surrounds the sound, but also by morphological structure, as these patterns all have to do with suffixes (endings such as *-ed*, *-ing*, and *-s* are one type of suffix). Furthermore, some of the spelling patterns influenced by language of origin are also influenced by morphology, as most of our prefixes, suffixes, and roots derive from Latin or Greek. It's less important that we are able to neatly classify each pattern according to its influence, but rather that we have a broad arsenal of knowledge about how these predictable patterns work so that we can apply them as we read and spell.

In this section, we have taken a detailed look at the alphabetic principle and at some of the predictable patterns that help us to read and spell. As you consider these spelling patterns, remember the following:

- The spelling patterns **are not rules**; they are meant to be flexible (so there will be exceptions) but are generally reliable.
- Having a deep understanding of these patterns will inform your teaching and help you to explain certain confusing spelling conventions to your students. Remember that our explanations of these spelling patterns are **suited to the learning capacities of adults, not children**. We will explore how to teach your students to use these patterns as they read and spell in Part III.
- Predictable spelling patterns are influenced by the **position of sounds** in words, the **surrounding sounds**, the location of a sound **within a syllable**, some common **English conventions**, the word's **language of origin**, and **morphological structure**.

For a synthesis of the sounds and their related spellings, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 22-23: "Phonics Resources"); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFiANet. ✖

⁵² Moats, Louisa Cook. *Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2000, p. 85.

⁵³ Ibid.

Review of Part I

Part I of this text provided you with a great deal of background knowledge about the construction of English speech and print. Though you will not present information about speaking, reading, or spelling to your students in such precise terms, you will use this deep understanding of our spoken and written language to give clear and accurate information to your students. The information that you learned about **phonetics** will help you guide all of your students to articulate consonant and vowel sounds correctly and will aid your work with the small number of students who struggle to hear and produce sounds. Your understanding of the **alphabetic principle**—the connection between our sounds and letters—will help you to draw your students’ attention to the predictable patterns that help us to read and spell. In the next section of this chapter, we will give guidance on the best methods through which to teach the building blocks of literacy.

II. Teaching the Building Blocks of Literacy Through Direct, Explicit, and Systematic Methods

The building blocks of literacy are the underlying processes required to read with fluency. The key skills students must learn are:

- Book and Print Awareness
 - understanding the function and purpose of books and print
- Phonological and Phonemic Awareness
 - hearing and manipulating sounds in spoken speech
- Phonics and The Alphabetic Principle, including:
 - identifying and naming alphabet letters
 - understanding sound-symbol correspondences and spelling patterns
 - using knowledge about these patterns to decode words
- Word and Structural Analysis, including:
 - analyzing the meaningful parts of words to decode them

As you can see, the skills that constitute the building blocks of literacy are clearly defined. This is because reading researchers and educators have done extensive study in this area and achieved broad consensus on both what constitutes these building blocks and their great importance to student achievement. In *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*, a congressionally commissioned review of reading research, Adams evaluated all the existing studies on beginning reading instruction. She found that:

- Children who receive explicit, systematic phonics instruction are more likely to become excellent readers than those who do not.
- The above is especially true for “slower or economically disadvantaged students.”⁵⁴

Subsequent research, catalogued by the National Research Council in 1998 and the National Reading Panel in 2001, has shown overwhelmingly that:

- Teaching students phonemic awareness directly improves students’ reading and spelling abilities.
- Teaching phonics and the alphabetic principle explicitly and systematically is one of the most powerful tools for assuring students become good readers.

⁵⁴Adams, Marilyn J. “Is phonics a worthwhile component of phonics instruction?” *Reading Rockets: News and Views: Research*, 2004 Online at <http://www.readingrockets.org/article.php?ID=248>, accessed 7/10/2010.

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Explicit and systematic phonics instruction is the most efficient and effective way to teach students to decode, and thus to read independently. Because the majority of students we teach are already lagging significantly behind their peers in their literacy development (even in Kindergarten), we must choose the most efficient and effective route to teaching them to read. As Lisa Delpit, noted expert on multicultural education, describes, it is critical that we teach young students without strong pre-literacy skills even more efficiently and explicitly than we do their more advantaged counterparts.⁵⁵ Since students without sufficient exposure to language and literacy before age five often have not had the opportunity to infer critical ideas about letters, sounds, and words, they require explicit phonics instruction that will remove the mystery for them. In this way, we can close the gap between our students and those who come to Kindergarten farther ahead. Clearly, we have no time to waste!

We now will turn to the specifics of providing instruction in the building blocks of literacy. Using the information learned in Part I, we will describe what children should

learn and how you can best communicate this information using effective, research-based strategies and activities. You will learn how to:

- (1) Build students' book and print awareness
- (2) Teach phonological and phonemic awareness
- (3) Provide explicit instruction in phonics and the alphabetic principle, including how to:
 - Teach students to identify and name letters
 - Introduce sound-symbol correspondences
 - Practice and review phonics skills through reading and spelling
 - Ensure that students can read high frequency words automatically
- (4) Teach more advanced word and structural analysis
- (5) Correct student errors in effective ways

Building Students' Book and Print Awareness

One of the first tasks of school is to show students how books work. Throughout Kindergarten and first grade, teachers constantly review the elements of books and the concepts of print. Teaching book and print awareness is most easily accomplished with a Big Book. Use the Big Book to model appropriate reading behaviors for students (the right way to hold a book or how to find the title and author, for example).

What Do We Mean By "Explicit and Systematic" Instruction?

The phrase "explicit and systematic" instruction has been used so often in the literacy world that its meaning has been obscured. It is important to clarify what we mean when we advise teachers to provide explicit and systematic instruction in the building blocks of literacy.

- **"Explicit" refers to the direct instruction** teachers provide in the patterns of our language and how to use knowledge of those patterns to read. So, teachers teach that *s* represents /s/, *i* represents /i/, and *t* represents /t/, and then teach students to blend those sounds together to read *sit*. Because explicit phonics instruction teaches students how to match letters to sounds and blend sounds to read words, children can eventually relegate this process to lower-level mental functions and free up energy for comprehension.
- **"Systematic" refers to the scope** (the range of skills to be taught) **and sequence** (the order in which they will be taught) of skills. You will progress through instruction in sounds and letters in a predictable, systematic way that accounts for how difficult it is to pronounce or spell each sound. For example, you will teach /ĕ/ (as in *bed*) before you teach /ē/ (as in *beet*) because the former sound has two predictable spellings while the latter has eight.

⁵⁵ Delpit, Lisa. *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: New Press, 1996.

Consider the following glimpse into a first grade classroom in which the teacher is reviewing concepts about books and print during a Shared Reading lesson:

Ms. Carranza is teaching a poem from her Big Book, *Pickled Peppers* in the second month of school. She takes out the Big Book and places it on a chart stand at the front of the class carpet. Her students already know the proper orientation of a book and left-to-right progression, so Ms. Carranza begins by asking, "Who would like to volunteer to come up and read the title for us?"

Since the students have read this book several times and know the title, about half of the students raise their hands. Christian comes to the book and reads, "*Pickled Peppers*" as Ms. Carranza moves her fingers under the words. She then says, "Thank you, Christian. Can you also point to the author?" Christian hesitates, so Ms. Carranza interjects after a few seconds, "Please call on someone to help you." Christian selects Maribel, who points to the author's name on the front cover. Ms. Carranza sends the students back to the carpet and then says, "I want to turn to the part that tells me what page my poem will be on, the Table of ..." the students chime in, "Contents!"

She turns to the Table of Contents as she notes, "The Table of Contents is always in the beginning of the books so you can easily find it. Oh, here it is, right at the beginning!" She continues by locating the poem she wants to read. She then asks a student to come up and point to the part of the Table of Contents that tells what page the poem will be on. Esther points to the number, and Ms. Carranza asks, "How do you know that our poem is on that page?" Esther replies, "The dots connect it." Ms. Carranza, "The dots connect the title to the number, you're correct. Can you turn to the correct page please?" Esther does. Ms. Carranza then reads the poem to the students, tracking print as she goes with a pointer so her arm does not obstruct the view of any students.

Including reading the poem aloud, this lesson takes about five minutes. Ms. Carranza knows that she could spend more time, but she feels that practicing concepts of book and print awareness for a short time each day is more beneficial than focusing on the skills in great detail at one time. We agree.

In Kindergarten, students need much of the same information that Ms. Carranza is reinforcing a year later. However, they also need more basic practice in tracking print and learning that visual word length is somewhat associated with the length of pronunciation. For instance, at the beginning of the year, Kindergarten teachers might give all of their students name necklaces and then call two students with names of different lengths to the front of the room to show off their nametags. The teacher tells the class both names

In What Grade Levels Do I Teach Book and Print Awareness?

Book and print awareness develops in **Kindergarten and first grade**. Teachers in these grade levels should be conscious to build book and print awareness into their reading activities each day. Beyond first grade, teachers can continue to mention concepts of books and print where appropriate, but need not spend instructional time on this topic.

What Students Must Know About Books and Print:

- How to hold a book right-side up
- Print progresses from left to right
- The cover and what information it contains
- Where the title is located and what information it gives readers
- What authors and illustrators do
- The purpose and function of the Table of Contents, including using the numbers to locate pages
- How to use the numbers at the bottom of the page
- Words are bounded by spaces
- Words are made of letters and some words are longer than others
- The length of the word tells us something about how long it is to say
- Sentences begin with capital letters and end with punctuation marks, including periods, exclamation marks, and questions
- The function of various types of punctuation

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and asks them to look at the words and tell which is longer. This connects the length of print to the length of sound using words that are very familiar to young children—their own names.

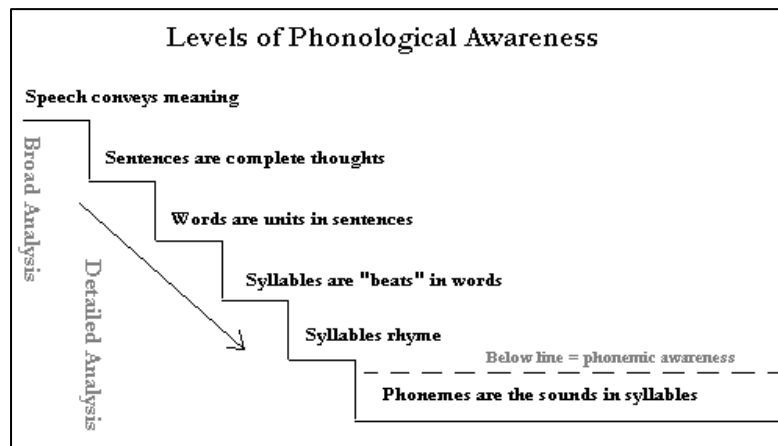
Teaching Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

As you learned in chapter one, phonological awareness is the understanding that spoken language is composed of units of speech, such as words, syllables, rhymes (*found* and *pound*), onsets (the part of the syllable before the vowel, such as *sw* in *swim*) and rimes (the part of the syllable including the vowel and everything that follows, such as the *im* in *swim*). Phonemic awareness, a subset of phonological awareness, is the understanding that words are made up of individual sounds, or phonemes (*maps* contains four phonemes, /m...ă...p...s/ while *shock* contains three, /sh...ö...ck/). We know that competencies in phonological awareness are critical to becoming an effective reader because they help children understand that words are made up of sounds and allow children to break a word down into its component sounds, and then put those sounds back together to produce the word. Neither phonological nor phonemic awareness requires knowledge of print, as the combination of sounds and letters is phonics, the next stage of reading development.

In What Grade Levels Do I Teach Phonological and Phonemic Awareness?

Phonological and phonemic awareness develops in **Kindergarten and first grade**. If some of your second-fifth grade students have weak phonological awareness, it will be necessary to provide differentiated instruction to teach them these requisite skills.

Phonological and phonemic awareness can be visualized along a continuum of increasingly discrete analysis. You can see this in the diagram to the left. The broadest type of phonological awareness is awareness that people speak in parts called sentences, each with its own information. More discrete is the realization that words make up sentences; then, that syllables make up words; and finally, that phonemes make up syllables. You will not necessarily teach these in this order; it is perfectly fine to teach a lesson on words in sentences on the same day you count syllables in words.



As you read the instructional information on phonological and phonemic awareness, you will notice that some activities are solely auditory and others involve the use of print. There is no reason that phonological awareness be divorced from the rest of the literacy curriculum. When students are practicing recognizing words by reading them separately from a poem, they are exercising phonological awareness regardless of the visual cue. As a new teacher, you may worry that using print with phonological awareness activities will undermine the focus on phonological awareness. Integrating some of these activities with other literacy domains is perfectly acceptable.

Planning and Implementing Instruction in Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

While phonological and phonemic awareness instruction is critical, it does not need to be time consuming. In Kindergarten and first grade, these lessons should take no more than ten minutes and should be fun, but informative. Thankfully, many great Kindergarten activities lend themselves very well to this type of instruction. If your reading program does not include phonological and phonemic awareness tasks for Kindergarten and beginning first grade students, or if you are teaching older

students (especially those with auditory processing disorders), you will need another resource. *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children* by Adams, Foorman, Lundberg and Beeler is an excellent resource for these activities and includes a scope and sequence of activities for Kindergarten and first grade students.⁵⁶

The following activities all address the various levels of phonological awareness (except phonemic awareness, which will be handled separately). Again, **this is only the tip of the iceberg**. It would be impossible in a few pages to summarize the range of possible and advisable activities you might do with your students. In addition to using your program, and, if necessary, *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children*, ask veteran Kindergarten and first grade teachers what phonological awareness activities they recommend.

- **Listening:** Kindergarten students need to learn to discriminate categories of sounds. To that end, collect some noisy objects. Show them to the class. Then, have students close their eyes while you make noises with each one. Have students identify the object that made the sound. You can also move to different parts of the room to make the sounds and have students point (with eyes closed) to the origin of the sound.
- **Following Directions:** To communicate the concept that speech conveys meaning, students need to learn to listen carefully to directions. Play games with Kindergarteners where they need to perform tasks, such as placing objects in different locations. For example, you might tell students to place a book under, on, beside, or behind a chair. You can also play Simon Says with similar kinds of words, including the words left and right and increasingly difficult prepositions (which you will always explain before using).
- **Rhymes and Songs:** Kindergarten students should read and hear lots of nursery rhymes, common songs, and poems. Children enjoy these immensely, and they have many built-in opportunities for practicing hearing and producing different sounds and rhyming patterns. Some sample lessons are below. However, there are dozens of other activities that can be done with songs and poems. Again, *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children* includes many activities to do with songs, in addition to their lyrics (the words to which you may have forgotten since you were five).

“Down By the Bay”

* = Teacher sings.

= Students repeat.

@ = All sing.

* Down by the bay, #

* Where the watermelons grow, #

* Back to my home, #

* I dare not go, #

* For if I do, #

@ My mother will say, ay, ay,

* “Did you ever see a _____?”

@ Down by the bay.

Repeat as many times as desired.

In Mr. Hanson’s Kindergarten class during the second week of school, the students learn a song called “Down By the Bay.” (The lyrics are printed in the box to the right.) Before beginning the song, Mr. Hanson explains to the students that they will be practicing rhyming. He says, “When I say, ‘Did you ever see,’ listen carefully! You can guess the rhyme. If I say, ‘Did you ever see a bug under a ...’, what would come next?” The students do not respond, so Mr. Hanson offers a choice: “What would rhyme with bug? If it rhymes with bug, it

⁵⁶ Adams, Marilyn Jager, et al. *A Classroom Curriculum: Phonemic Awareness in Young Children*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Co., 1998.

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sounds the same at the end. Would the bug be under a chair or under a rug? Which word rhymes with bug, chair or rug?” About half of the students respond, “Rug.” The teacher tells them they will practice rhyming when they sing the song. The teacher sings the song slowly and the students repeat each line. He enunciates clearly to make sure the students can repeat the words. When the teacher reaches “Did you ever ...”, he says, “Did you ever see a frog sit on a ...” He pauses for students to respond. They are still unsure, so Mr. Hanson offers another choice. “Where would a frog sit, on a log or on a car?” About 75% of students respond, “On a log!” Mr. Hanson continues this process twice more, continuing to sing slowly. He continues with “fox climb in a box” and “duck driving a truck.” As the song continues, the students become increasingly successful at creating the rhyming words that complete each line.

- **Count Words:** In her Kindergarten classroom in the third week of school, Ms. Perez reads aloud “Hickory Dickory Dock” from a Big Book of nursery rhymes. As she reads, she tracks the print with her pointer to draw attention to the separate words. When the poem is complete, she returns to the first line and tells her students, “Poems are made up of different words. When authors write words, they separate the words with spaces.” She points to the spaces in the first line. She continues, “We can also hear the different words. Let’s read the first line again and count the different words. Ok, everyone read together.” The students and teacher read chorally, the teacher pausing slightly between each word. Ms. Perez asks, “How many words did you hear in the first line?” She signals the students may all answer together. “Three!” they respond. Ms. Perez has a student come to the Big Book to point and count the spaces between the words. She repeats this with two more lines of the poem.⁵⁷
- **Be the Words:** In Ms. Brown’s Kindergarten class in the fifth week of school, students sing, “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” After they sing the song, Ms. Brown asks the class, “How many words were there in the first line? Let’s sing it again and count the words on our fingers.” The class sings, with Ms. Brown leading them slowly to separate the words, “Mary had a little lamb.” Ms. Brown holds up a finger for each word she sings, nodding at students who are also using their fingers as they sing. “How many words did you hear? Show me with your fingers,” she continues. About 90% of students hold up five fingers. (A few seem to have counted syllables, holding up seven fingers, but Ms. Brown decides not to address this error, as she wants to see if these few students are able to correct their mistakes through participation in the rest of the lesson.) Then, Ms. Brown asks children to come to the front of the room to be each word. “I am going to pick some people to come to the front and say a word from the poem. The first word was ... Mary. Who would like to come up and say Mary?” Ms. Brown tells each student which word they will be. Then, she explains to the class, “I am going to point to each student with the magic pointer. They will say their word. Let’s see if it sounds like it does when we sing it.” Ms. Brown has students say

We also do lots of things with our bodies to help us segment words into sounds. We pull words apart with our hands. We do sound taps on our arms and from there we can figure out which sound is in the beginning, middle, and end of words. I love teaching phonological awareness because it can be as exciting and as fun as you make it.

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⁵⁷ One instructional note: Ms. Perez could have done this with every line of the poem, but she was concerned that the children would lose focus and also that her lesson not take more than five minutes, since she had a second phonological awareness activity planned.

their words in sequence, to see if they can approximate normal speech. During the first try, two students need to be told their word again. Ms. Brown says, "You all said your words correctly. Great job. This time, let's say it faster to see if we can make it sound like the song." They repeat it, remembering their words and with greater fluency. She compliments them again, has them return to their carpet squares, and repeats this process with the remainder of the poem with different students.

- **Blend Syllables:** Ms. Finney's Kindergarteners have already learned to clap syllables. They can do this well with words up to three syllables. She is now interested in helping them blend syllables. Since this can be challenging, she decides to use visual cues to help. She selects some pictures of animals from a picture dictionary, expands them on the copier, and brings them to class. She says: "This afternoon, girls and boys, we are going to practice putting syllables together. I am going to show you a part of a picture, and I will tell you what it says. Then, you can repeat it." She hides the pictures from the students. The first word is *tiger*. She cuts the copied picture into two pieces. She holds up the first one and says, "/tī/." She points under it, and says, "When I point to the piece, you can say it. This is /tī/." She points and her students respond, "/tī/." She places the picture in a pocket chart. Then she says, "I am going to show you another piece. I know that it will make a picture you know, but I only want you to say the sound it says." She places the second half of the picture in the pocket chart, slightly separated from the first part. "/ger/," she says. She points. And the students reply, "/ger/." Ms. Finney continues, "Now, I will point to each piece and you will say it." When she points, the students say that syllable part. She now says, "Ok, now when I sweep my finger under the word [she demonstrates], you can say the whole thing. Are you ready?" She sweeps her finger. The students respond, "Tiger." The teacher sweeps again, the students respond and she smiles. "I like how you listened to the directions and watched my fingers," she says. "Now, let's try another one." She continues with camel, dolphin, giraffe, elephant, gorilla, kangaroo, and finally hippopotamus (going from shorter to longer words).

We do a nursery rhyme every week, locating rhyming words and clapping the rhythm. And songs . . . the kids love them! You can do simple things like singing "Zippity-Do-Da" but you change it to all b's or all w's . . . "Bippity-Bo-Ba" or "Wippity-Wo-Wa". The kids think it's silly and they have fun with it, but it's also teaching them about initial sounds.

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Teach For America**

In the area of **phonemic awareness**, there are several tasks you can ask students can do to improve their ability to hear and work with individual sounds. Note that none of these tasks relies on print for students to complete them successfully. As always, before you ask students to complete any of these tasks without guidance, you must model how to do them and gradually involve your students in the activity. Consider the following table that lists and explains the most effective phoneme manipulation tasks:

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Phonemic Awareness Task	Explanation	Example
Replication	Students repeat a sound with correct articulation.	Teacher: Put your top teeth on your bottom lip to say /f/. Ready? Students: /f/
Isolation	Students identify a single sound in a word.	Teacher: What is the first sound in <i>bath</i> ? Students: The first sound in <i>bath</i> is /b/.
Identification	Students recognize the same sounds in different words.	Teacher: What sound is the same in <i>math</i> , <i>mind</i> , and <i>money</i> ? Students: The first sound, /m/, is the same.
Categorization	Students recognize the word in a set that has an “odd” sound.	Teacher: Which word does not belong? <i>Hug</i> , <i>hut</i> , <i>run</i> . Students: <i>Run</i> doesn’t belong. It doesn’t start with /h/.
Deletion	Students remove a sound from a spoken word to create a new word.	Teacher: What is /sheep/ without the /p/? Students: <i>She</i> .
Addition	Students add a sound to a spoken word to create a new word.	Teacher: What word do you hear if you add /s/ to /loe/? Students: <i>Slow</i> .
Rhyming	Students change the sound(s) preceding the vowel to create a new rhyming word.	Teacher: The word is <i>lit</i> . What word do you make if you change the /l/ in /lit/ to a /s/? Students: <i>Sit</i> .
Segmenting and Counting	Students separate spoken words into individual sounds.	Teacher: How many sounds are in <i>mouse</i> ? Count them with your fingers as you say them. Students: /m/ /ou/ /s/. Three sounds.
Blending	Students combine individual sounds into a spoken word.	Teacher: What word is /b/ /a/ /n/ /d/? Students: /B/ /a/ /n/ /d/ is <i>band</i> !
Substitution	Students replace one sound in a word with another.	Teacher: The word is <i>cop</i> . Change /p/ to /t/. What’s the new word? Students: <i>Cot</i> !

All of these tasks can have value for students. The more ways students are able to manipulate phonemes, the more likely they are to internalize these skills. However, only some of these tasks are **highly correlated** with reading and spelling. For all students with weak phonemic awareness skills, **the two most critical tasks are segmenting and blending**, as segmenting is required to identify separate phonemes for spelling and blending is required to sound out words.⁵⁸ So, for older children who still require phonemic awareness support, focus on these two tasks is the most efficient means of assuring they develop the necessary skills. For younger children, segmenting, blending, and phoneme isolation activities (isolating initial, medial, and final sounds) are most important. Consider the following classroom examples of the most important phonemic awareness tasks:

- **Phoneme Isolation:** In Mr. Martinez’s first grade class, the students practice isolating sounds daily. As students are learning the short vowels, Mr. Martinez plans lessons to emphasize the short vowel sounds heard in the middle of words. Those lessons work like this: “This morning, you will practice listening for the short vowel sounds in words. Let’s review the sounds of the short vowels we have learned. Fabian, will you please point to the short vowels and have the class repeat them.” Fabian takes the pointer and points to the alphabet letters for the short vowels. He says, “sound” as he points to each and the students say the sound. (Mr. Martinez has shown the students how to do this four other times, so Fabian knows what to do). As Fabian reads, Mr. Martinez surveys the classroom, watching to

⁵⁸ For older students who may need more extensive phonemic awareness drill, the following book may be helpful: Greene, Jane Fell, Ed.d. *Sounds and Letters for Readers and Spellers*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West, 1997.

see which students might have difficulty with this activity. When all five short vowels are read, Mr. Martinez takes the pointer and says, "Now, I will say some words. I want you to listen carefully to tell me what sound you hear. It will be one of the short vowels. Listen carefully. When I snap my fingers, everyone say the vowel sound. Thumbs up if you're ready." Students raise thumbs. "Ok, mat." Mr. Martinez does not orally stretch the word, but waits two seconds, and then snaps. About two-thirds of students say /a/. A few say /m/. Mr. Martinez responds, "I'll say that again. Listen for the sound in the middle." He repeats more slowly, "Mmaaah. Did you hear /m/ in the middle or /a/ in the middle?" Students: "/a/." Mr. Martinez continues, "I like how you listened for the sound in the middle. Fish. What is in the middle?" He snaps. Students: "/i/" Mr. Martinez: "Good. That is the short ..." Students: "I." Mr. Martinez: "Right. Next, set." Students: "/e/." Mr. Martinez: "That's the ..." Students: "Short E." He repeats this process with five more words, emphasizing the middle, short vowel sounds. It takes about 4 minutes to complete the lesson.

- **Phoneme Segmentation:** In Ms. Murphy's 1st grade class, the students practice segmenting on a daily basis at the beginning of the year. Segmenting will help them become strong spellers, so Ms. Murphy teaches them a clear procedure. First, she practices with some simple words, showing students how to segment with their fingers. She says, "Today, we will learn how to listen to a word and figure out the sounds inside it. Let me show you how to do it. First, I will say the word, /cat/. I will say it again to listen to all the sounds in the word. /cat/. Now, I will say each sound separately and hold up a finger for each sound. Listen, /k/, /a/, /t/. [She holds up a finger as she says each phoneme.]⁵⁹ Now let's try one together. I will say the word, and then you will repeat it. I will point to you so you know when to talk. The word is /big/." Teacher points at students. Students say, "/big/." Ms. Murphy continues, "Let's say it again to make sure we heard all the sounds. /big/. [Again, she points and students repeat.] Now let's say all the sounds and hold up a finger for each one. /b/, /i/, /g/. [Students say sounds and hold up fingers]." The class continues with a few more examples. Then, Ms. Murphy decided to repeat the process without the signals to keep the lesson moving quickly and to ensure that her students remained engaged. She says, "Now, let's try this again. This time, when I say the word, just say it after me. I am not going to point at you. Ready? [Students nod.] Ok, here we go. /pet/. [Students repeat.]" Ms. Murphy continues the lesson with ten more example words.
- **Oral Blending:** In Ms. Murphy's first grade class, the students also practice blending sounds daily at the beginning of the year. Ms. Murphy's blending lessons function just like her segmenting lessons, only in reverse. Ms. Murphy's reading program suggests lists of words to blend, and she usually blends those. Ms. Murphy says, "Let's get ready to practice blending some sounds together to make a word. I'll say each sound and then you'll blend the sounds and say the word quickly."

She holds up fingers as she pronounces each sound, "/M/ /a/ /p/..." To signal that the children should respond, Ms. Murphy sweeps her hand in an arc from left to right (as the students see it) with the fingers raised, to demonstrate that the sounds are being blended. Then, when students are to say the word naturally, she moves her hand straight across from left to right. This technique will be used when Ms. Murphy does phonics blending. Ms.

⁵⁹ Note that Ms. Murphy holds up her right hand so that her knuckles face the students. She puts up her index finger first, then her middle finger, and so on. She does it this way to assure that the students see her fingers follow the left-to-right progression of print.

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Murphy asks her students to practice blending seven sets of sounds into words, using the same procedures each time.

As you can see, phonological awareness activities should be fun, informative, and brief. They should engage students in analyzing oral language at both a broad level (counting the words in a sentence) and a very narrow level (counting the sounds in a word). Developing your students' skills in these areas creates a solid foundation on which to add the next layer of instruction: the relationships between these sounds and our letters.

Teaching Phonics and the Alphabetic Principle

In addition to become experts at breaking words down into sounds and putting sounds together to make words, all students in elementary grades must receive literacy instruction that **includes extensive explicit, systematic phonics instruction**. Without it, students will struggle greatly in later grades. In this section, we describe methods for teaching students to identify and name letters, to understand the sound-symbol correspondences (including the spelling patterns previously discussed), to practice and review their phonics skills through reading and spelling, and to read high frequency words on sight.

Teaching Students to Identify and Name Letters

Before students can begin to understand the connection between letters and sounds, they first have to be able to identify and name the 26 alphabet letters. Kindergarten teachers use a variety of methods to teach students this skill, including discussing letters found in children's names, examining letters individually and talking about their features (some letters are written with circles and others are written with sticks, for instance), having students trace the shape of formations (with pencil and paper, in the air, with their finger on sandpaper cut-outs), and always connecting the visual representation of the letter with its name (A, B, C, etc.). There is no need to be especially creative in your methods because students simply need lots of exposure to how letters look and what they are named, and many opportunities to write the letters to master this skill. Students should be able to name both lower and upper case letters on sight, and you should track and monitor your students' letter-naming skills over the course of the Kindergarten year.

Instruction in Sound-Symbol Correspondences

Effective phonics instruction continues with solid introductions to each sound and the symbol or symbols that correlate with it. To this end, your students will benefit from having names for sounds that differ from alphabet letters, because more than half the alphabet letters represent sounds other than their commonly associated alphabet sound. For this reason, some reading programs have created their own names for the sounds. For example:

In What Grade Levels Do I Teach Phonics and the Alphabetic Principle?

Phonics instruction happens throughout elementary school. Students begin learning to identify and name letters, and to connect the most commonly associated sound to each letter, in **Kindergarten**. By the end of **first grade**, students should know all the English sounds and many of their spellings. They should understand that groups of letters make sounds that are sometimes distinct from the letters themselves. In **second and third grades** students will master reading longer words with complex spelling patterns. In **fourth and fifth grades**, students will be able to use the structure of words (prefixes, suffixes, roots, and multiple syllables) to decode.

*I have a tracking system of individual and group progress called the "Road to Reading," where students can see which letters they know, and which they still have to learn. We track progress on sticker charts at the front of the room for individual letters learned. Our group tracking is a road on a bulletin board, upon which we have placed stars bearing the letters 80% of the class has mastered. When we put up all the letters, we will reach the end of the road and be **READING!***

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- Open Court Reading has “sound-spelling cards” that include a name for each sound. The name matches a picture that functions as a mnemonic device. The “ball” card features a picture of basketball to represent the sound /b/. Students are also taught to pretend to bounce a ball when they say the /b/ sound, another mnemonic device. Programs that have simple memory devices like this are ideal for teaching younger children phonics. Each feature of the card – the picture, the name, the sound, and the action – helps children firmly place these sounds in memory.
- The Lindamood-Bell Phoneme Sequencing (LiPS) Program includes names for all the sounds. (These are the “Simple Names” we described in the section on phonetics.) Their names are designed to remind children of the mouth formation for each consonant phoneme. The “tongue tapper” name reminds students that their tongue taps the alveolar ridge when they say /t/ or /d/. The program also uses the words “voiced” and “unvoiced” to create distinctions between the pairs. The names for the LiPS sounds are somewhat less intuitive than those in other programs, although they are vastly more descriptive of the action of the mouth. The use of these names is most helpful for older children and adult non-readers who can remember the names but struggle with phonemic awareness.⁶⁰

If your district’s reading program includes devices to help children remember sounds, use them.

Although it might be appealing initially to use more linguistically descriptive or intuitive devices, avoid doing so. Your students probably have prior knowledge with the devices used in their program and will probably use them the following year. It is probably best to introduce your own devices only in the absence of any such assistance built into your reading program.

Many reading programs have designed particular methods for introducing sounds. If your reading program suggests a particular method for introducing the sound-symbol correspondence, use it. If not, here are some **key principles to keep in mind as you introduce a new sound-symbol relationship**. Alongside these principles, we’ll see how a classroom teacher might put these principles into action. Ms. Bains, our example teacher, teaches a third/fourth grade combination class for students with special needs. Most of her students have learning disabilities in the area of reading, so she uses a first grade reading program to address her students’ decoding needs.

Ms. Bains has posted special “sound-spelling cards” provided by her reading program. On one side of each card, the alphabet letter of each card is written. On the reverse, the cards contain the alphabet letter at the top, a mnemonic picture to help students remember the sound (in this case, a zipper), and the graphemes for the sound at the bottom (in this case, *z* and *_s*).⁶¹ For sounds the class has already learned, Ms. Bains has turned the card to show the mnemonic picture and the graphemes. The remainder (at this point, about fifteen cards, including the sounds without an alphabet letter) show only the alphabet letter or nothing at all.

⁶⁰ The mouth formations can also be helpful for younger students, but this works best in a one-to-one setting, which will probably not fit into your busy schedule. With children ages five to eight, use devices that are easier to remember. Also note that some students with learning disabilities have short and long-term memory problems that impede development of new vocabulary. For these students, it is probably also best to avoid introducing new vocabulary if the terminology they already know provides some mnemonic clues.

⁶¹ Some reading programs include a “short vowel zz” spelling (from the floss + zz rule) in their phonics practice. Open Court Reading does not.

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Let's look into Ms. Bains' classroom to see **how she introduces a new sound** to her students:

- **Introduce the sound.** On this day, about three months into school, Ms. Bains is introducing the /z/ sound. Ms. Bains explains, "By the end of today we are going to be know which letters makes the sound /z/ and be able to read and spell words that have that sound in them. You all have already learned the way that we spell so many sounds and you are much better readers and spellers because of it! If you work hard today, you are going to become a little bit smarter." As she explains the objective, she turns over the sound-spelling card above the board. She explains that the picture of the zipper helps us remember the /z/ sound because "that's the sound a zipper makes" and explains that we spell this sound with the letter z or with an s at the end of some words.
- **Have your students practice saying the sound.** Ms. Bains asks her students to remind her of the sound by pronouncing it to a partner and then along with the whole class. The /z/ sound fills the room.
- **Introduce the letter or letters associated with the sound.** "There are two ways that we can spell the /z/ sound," Ms. Bains explains, pointing to her sound spelling card. "In most words we spell /z/ with the letter z. But if a word ends with the sound /z/, then we spell it *blank s*."
- **Practice writing the letters and saying the sound (this can be done with a finger in the air).** Next, Ms. Bains has students practice spelling the letters that represent the sound. She explains the formation of the z carefully, since some students write it backwards. As she demonstrates on the board, she says, "Starting point on the middle line, across to the right, down to the left, and across to the right again. /z/." Then, she asks the children to write the letter as they say the sound. Then, Ms. Bains repeats this procedure for the *_s*. She says, "The blank tells us that ..." and students chime in, "a letter goes in the space." Ms. Bains nods and adds, "Yes, and it tells us that the s is at the end of a word. We use this spelling often when we are spelling a plural, like *girls* or *boys*."⁶²
- **Ask students to provide words that contain the target sound; write those words as students suggest them.** Then, Ms. Bains reads the students a story containing references to the zipper—the mnemonic device for this sound. Ms. Bains asks her students to listen for the /z/ sounds in the word. When the story is finished, Ms. Bains asks the students which words contained the /z/ sound and students share words from the story.
- **Practice hearing the target sound in spoken words.** "Now," she continues, "let's practice listening for the /z/ sound at the beginning of some words." As she reads example words, students put a thumbs up if they hear /z/ at the beginning. Ms. Bains repeats this procedure, this time asking students to put a thumbs up if they hear /z/ at the end of a word.

Short e is always the hardest short vowel sound for Kindergarteners and first graders to remember! We sing a short e song, to the tune of "Frere Jacques," complete with movements: "Where is short e, Where is short e? Here I am, Here I am. I am in a pet bed, elephant and fresh bread, /e/ /e/ /e/, /e/ /e/ /e/." I got this song from the internet. The internet has tons of websites with songs, poems, and games to help develop phonological awareness.

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⁶² Ms. Bains additional explanation is a perfect example of information that students should know but for which they should not be made fully responsible. Ms. Bains will remind students that this spelling comes at the end of a word when they use it in the middle, but she does not expect students to remember this perfectly.

- **Provide practice in blending words with the sound (and other sounds that you have already taught).** After practicing the grapheme and the phoneme separately, Ms. Bains blends words with the students. (Blending is described in more detail below.) She blends words that contain sounds and spellings students have learned. Some of the words they blend include *zip*, *his*, *buzz*, *bibs*, *zigzag*, and *frogs*. Notice that her list includes words with both spellings of /z/, a word with a blend (*frog*), and a multi-syllable word that she blends in parts (*zigzag*).
- **Ask students to spell words with the sound (and other sounds that they have already learned).** Next, the class practices spelling words with the /z/ sound. They call this activity “dictation”. Ms. Bains begins, “For dictation today, we are spelling words with the /z/ sound. There are only two spellings we will use. What are they?” She points to the card and the students read the spellings. “Good,” she continues. “To begin, I will say a word and you will repeat it. The first word is *zip*. What’s the word?” Her students reply, “*Zip*.” Ms. Bains continues, “Ok, now let’s segment the word, separate its sounds. Hold up one finger for each sound. Ready, go.” Together, the students, teacher, and classroom aide say, “/z/.../i/.../p/.” They hold up a finger for each sound. “What spelling will you use for the /z/ sound,” she asks. “Z,” the students reply. “Good. We can’t use *blank s* because...” Students chime in, “it’s not the end of the word!” Ms. Bains continues this procedure for three more words and then dictates a sentence. She includes both spellings and known sight words in the sentence: *Zet’s dog has a zigzag on its back*.
- **Give students many opportunities to read fully decodable text containing the sound (and whichever letters are being taught), sight words that have already been introduced, and other sounds that students have already learned.** The students finish the lesson by reading a decodable book which includes only the *z* spelling of /z/. Ms. Bains’ reading program contains a second decodable book for the *_s* spelling of /z/, but she is planning to practice this at a separate time. The students read the decodable once chorally. Then, Ms. Bains has the students read the book, asking different groups of children to read at various points. She helps students sound out challenging words by saying the sounds slowly with them.

After you have introduced a new sound-spelling correspondence to your students, you will ensure that they learn to use it in their reading and spelling by having them participate in **blending activities**. Blending is possibly the **most important activity** done in any first grade class. Blending combines the oral blending task with letters. Most commonly, teachers have students read lists of words from the board using a particular procedure (described below) and then have the students practice reading some of the same words in sentences.

Creating a blending lesson first requires that you know what you need to teach. For example, after a few weeks of phonics instruction in first grade, students will have learned /a/, /b/, /i/, /k/, /l/, /s/, and /t/, among others. At this point, you can construct a blending lesson that follows the introduction of a new sound. If you are introducing the /d/ sound spelled *d* and you have already completed all the tasks required to introduce a sound prior to this step (refer to the above section on sound introduction), you can now blend words that include this sound. If your reading program does not include word lists, you can make your own. (Remember that words with complex syllables are more challenging than words with simple syllables. You should include both types, but recognize that the complex words will be more challenging.) As a first grade teacher, your word list might look like this: dab, did, dad, sad, lid, slid, list, slit, bid, bits, tad, dill, lad, cat, cast. Notice that not every word includes the target sound, as many sounds as possible have been used, and both simple and complex syllables are included. Your lesson should also include a sentence or two to practice reading fluently with real text. Here are sentences you might use: “The sad lad did not have a cat. Did Dad sit on the lid?” These sentences only include words that can be decoded using the sounds students have learned, along with high frequency words. Clearly,

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these sentences do not begin to approximate real literature, but they give students fluency practice that will help them to read stories in decodable books independently.

To blend the words, have students say the sounds for the letters as you write them and then blend them to make a word. You can use verbal instructions and hand signals to teach this process and make it quick and easy for your students to follow:

- As you write each letter (or letters in the case of digraphs such as *sh* or vowel teams like *ea*), say “sound” to prompt students to pronounce the corresponding sound.
- When you want them to blend the letter-sounds, say “blend.”
- When you want them to pronounce the word naturally, ask, “What’s the word?”
- Hand signals might include pointing at the letters for students to say the sounds; sweeping the finger in an arc under the word to blend; and sweeping the finger straight across to say it naturally.

To have a clear understanding of blending activities in the classroom, consider Mr. Kang’s first grade class in which students have learned the /d/ sound, as described above, and are now practicing blending. He is blending “through the vowel” for the first few words so students can practice blending shorter parts before they try longer ones. Here’s how he does it for the first four words:

Teacher Action	Written on the Board	Teacher Talk/Action	Students Say...
Write:	d	“Sound”/point	/d/
Write:	da	“Sound”/point	/a/
Blend:	da	“Blend”/sweep finger under sounds	/da/
Write:	dab	“Sound”/point	/b/
Blend:	dab	“Blend”/sweep finger under word (as slowly as necessary to help students blend)	/dab/ (as slow as necessary)
Read:	dab	“What word?”/sweep straight across	/dab/ (naturally)

After Mr. Kang feels confident his students remember the vowels and are blending well, he transitions to blending with slightly less support. Now, he writes the words and points to the sounds. The students only blend when they reach the end of the word. It works this way:

Teacher Action	Written on the Board	Teacher Talk/Action	Students Say...
Write:	lid		
Point	lid	Point to each sound and say “sound”	/l/.../i/.../d/
Blend:	lid	“Blend”/sweep finger under word	/lid/
Read:	lid	“What word?”/sweep straight across	/lid/

When the students have blended all of the words, Mr. Kang asks his students to read two sentences. (The sad lad did not have a cat. Did Dad sit on the lid?) He underlines each high frequency word, points to them on the class word wall, and has students pronounce them. Then, the class reads the sentences together slowly to blend the words as they read. Mr. Kang guides this instruction by providing oral support with his voice. To help students develop independence, he also has the students reread the sentences to a partner and on their own, without his assistance.

Once students have practiced blending and writing words using the letter-sounds that they have learned, you can provide them practice with varied types of constructive phonics practice. A word of caution: many teachers feel the need to design creative ways for students to practice phonics skills in an attempt to increase student engagement. This is largely unnecessary and can in fact be counterproductive for students. Your best bet is to use a predictable instruction sequence that includes introducing the new

sound-spelling correspondence, providing practice blending and write words that contain the correspondences students have been taught, and creating tasks in which students have to think critically about what they've learned. Two options for constructive phonics practice are:

- Students **sort words according to sound-spelling correspondence or spelling pattern.** Teachers give students word cards to sort individually or with a partner, or simply list words on the board and guide students to search for common patterns in whole class practice. From these sorts, students can organize words that contain the same rime patterns (the *-id* in *did*) into "families". For instance, *did*, *lid*, and *slid* could be grouped as a word "family."
- Students can **build words with letter cards that use learned correspondences or patterns.** To build words, the teacher gives a series of instructions that require the student to rearrange letters to spell a chain of words that use the patterns students have learned. A typical chain might include *dab*, *dad*, *did*, *lid*, *slid*, and *slab*, requiring students to use six letter cards in the exercise. The teacher begins by asking students to use their letter cards to spell *dab*, and continues to cue students to make subtle changes to the target word to build a new one. For instance, the teacher might say, "You've built *dab*. Now change the /b/ to /d/. What's the new word?" The students respond, "*Dad!*" The teacher continues, "And how did the final consonant change?" The students answer, "Change the *b* to a *d*." Alternatively, the teacher might say, "You've built *dab*. Now we'll change the word to *dad*. Repeat the word with me: *Dad!* Now say the sounds with me. /D...ă...d/. Great, now build the word with your letter cards. [Pauses to let students build the word.] Let's spell the word together." Many teachers find *Making Words* by Patricia Cunningham or a modified version thereof to be excellent practice of this kind.

Using the Word Wall to Teach High Frequency Words

In addition to instruction on how to decode words, students must be taught to recognize those words that cannot be determined from sound-spelling correspondences, which include many of the 100 most frequently used words in the English language (like *said*, *does*, and *of*). In elementary school classrooms, these high frequency words are often introduced slowly and posted on words walls as a reference when reading and spelling. It is useful to reference these words frequently so students are highly familiar with them and their spellings. It is also a good idea to include the names of all the students in the class on this wall so students can use them in writing and because names tend to be non-decodable.

Amazing, isn't it? We have over a half-million words to communicate with, but half of everything that we write and read depends on only 0.02 percent—on only those 100 most frequent words.

Frank May, Author
*Reading As Communication*⁶³

Sometimes teachers expand the use of word walls to include students' weekly spelling words and less common words they want students to be able to spell.⁶⁴ We do not advise this use of the word wall. Students should be able to spell decodable words if they have been taught sound-spelling correspondences and spelling patterns; providing access to them on the word wall only increases students' dependence on "whole word" cues rather than phonic analysis. Students who depend on phonic analysis in reading and spelling are generally better readers and spellers because they can use their knowledge of the English phonics system to learn new words. Instead of allowing students to use word walls for spelling, refer

⁶³ May, Frank B. *Reading As Communication: Helping Children Write and Read*, 6th edition. New York: Merrill/Prentice Hall, 2002.

⁶⁴ We also caution the use of the word wall for vocabulary words. The high frequency word wall should focus on those words alone; it makes them an easy reference for a singular purpose. Vocabulary words are typically thematic and are best placed near theme bulletin boards to encourage their use when students refer to the concepts on that board. A vocabulary "word bank" is a good substitution for adding those words to the word wall.

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them to phonics charts or sound-spelling cards you have posted. Ideally, your reading program will include charts or cards to help students spell. If not, you should make your own charts that include the phoneme, its most common spellings, and a related mnemonic device.

For more information about creating a high frequency word wall, see “Fry’s 300 Instant Sight Words” in the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 34-35); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

Teaching Complex Spelling Patterns and Conventions Effectively

As students progress through elementary school, they will learn increasingly complex spelling patterns that are used less frequently in the English language. In Part One, we explored many of those patterns in great detail. Before we examine how to present appropriate phonics instruction to older elementary students, consider this idea. We teach students complex spelling patterns over several years so they build a mental stock of information about the options for pronunciation or spelling. Knowing many spelling *patterns* is more helpful than knowing many *rules* that constantly interfere with one another. In determining how to pronounce the word *field*, students must have learned that *ie* is a spelling for both /ī/ as in *pie* and /ē/ as in *field*. They can then make a reasonable choice based on their stock of information.

For second through fifth grade students who are learning more complex spelling patterns, the instructional sequence is slightly different but just as direct and explicit as our earlier examples. To teach your fifth grade students the *y* spelling of /ī/ in the middle of a word of Greek origin for instance (such as *gym*), you need not introduce the short *i* sound. Rather, you would explain to students that they are going to learn a new way to spell /ī/, and they might have noticed this spelling in their reading already. The rest of the instructional sequence might look something like this:

Guidance for Teaching Older, Struggling Readers

Older students may need review of the alphabetic principle, as they may never have fully grasped the consistency with which letters produce specific sounds. Students who do not understand the letter-sound connection tend to guess at words after reading the first couple of letters, thinking that the remainder of the word provides little information to help decipher the pronunciation. It is important that students believe that print can help them read words, even if it is not always consistent. Otherwise, they will continue to guess at any word that is not immediately recognizable.

- Provide your students with a **clear, student-friendly explanation of the spelling pattern**. You might say, “You all have learned that some of our English words come from the Greek language. Some of the vocabulary words that we have learned in our science units, like *biology* and *photosynthesis*, are good examples. The pattern that we are going to work with today also comes from the Greek language. The spelling pattern is that *y* in the middle of a Greek word says /ī/. When you see a *y* in the middle of a word, it is often saying our short *i* sound. Today we are going to add this spelling pattern to your mental files so that you can read and spell words that contain it.”
- Share **words that contain the targeted spelling pattern** (*gym*) and challenge students to think of words they have read that have the *y* spelling of /ī/ in the middle. Make a list of the words that you and your students come up with. (A list for this pattern might include *gym*, *mystery*, *gymnasium*, *mysterious*, *photosynthesis*, and *chlorophyll*.)
- Guide your students to **blend** the words that contain the targeted pattern, syllable by syllable. For example, your students would blend /mis...ter...ee/. This will likely prove challenging for your students at first, but over time it will dramatically improve their ability to decode multi-syllable words.
- **Dictate** a few sentences for students to write or ask them to create sentences for their classmates that contain words with the targeted spelling. (An example sentence is: *We prefer*

to spend time in the gymnasium because we are allowed to play exciting games like dodge ball and floor hockey.)

- Instruct your students to **notice when they read words with the targeted pattern** and to record and share them with classmates, perhaps at the end of word study each day.

As you can see, though the content of our word study instruction changes dramatically over the course of a child's elementary school career, the methods that we use to teach that content remain stable and predictable. We begin by **introducing the sound-spelling correspondence or pattern** (in the way explained above), **blending sounds to form words** (as described), and **providing opportunities for constructive practice** (such as sorting or building words). It may surprise you that the methods by which we teach phonics are so straightforward, especially given the complexity of the English language. But research studies have shown again and again these methods work for all students, and are especially effective for students who are lagging behind in their ability to read.

Some teachers question whether students will remain engaged in this type of direct, explicit word study instruction. Our answer is *yes!* Teachers who are consistent in both the language and procedures of word study find that their students crave that structure and come to appreciate knowing what is expected of them, academically and procedurally, day after day. Further, and perhaps more importantly, students who receive this level of explicit phonics instruction are more successful as readers, and students who experience success with a task are most typically engaged and eager to participate in it. Though there is no instructional harm in supplementing your instruction with word study games or activities in literacy centers, creative forms of practice are no substitute for the direct instruction and repetitive practice that students require if they are to learn to decode.

Teaching Word and Structural Analysis

As students begin to grasp spelling patterns and are able to use them to decode effectively, it's time to add another layer to their understanding of the English language. As we explored in Part One, the spelling of many of our words is influenced by morphology—the way that meaningful units of language, like prefixes or suffixes, combine to form words. Though we will consider in detail how to help students use morphemic analysis to determine word meaning in Chapter Six, we will briefly explain what students need to understand about morphemes to help them decode and provide an example of morphemic instruction in a fourth grade classroom.

In What Grade Levels Do I Teach Word and Structural Analysis?

First graders should learn some common contractions and compound words. In **second grade and third grade**, teach students to use the past tense and plural spelling patterns to assist in pronunciation and spelling, along with more advanced contractions and compound words. **Fourth and fifth grade students** should learn to use knowledge about syllable types to decode lengthy words. They should also learn to use prefixes, suffixes, and common Greek and Latin roots for the purpose of decoding as well.

Whether you are teaching second graders the *-ed* ending or fifth graders the Latin root *terr*, guide students to look within a lengthy word for recognizable chunks that can help them to decode. Students will become much more efficient word solvers if they can break a long word like *uncomplicated* into smaller pieces, using knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, and syllables along the way.

To gain insight into the specifics of instruction in word and structural analysis, consider the following example:

The word study lesson in Ms. Washington's fourth grade class focuses on recognizing common Latin roots and using them to help in decoding long words. Ms. Washington begins by explaining the concept of Latin roots. She says, "Many of our words come from

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a language called Latin. In Latin, people added prefixes and suffixes to roots to make new words. Because many of our English words come from Latin, we can look for Latin roots as we try to break long words into smaller chunks. Today, we will learn a new Latin root to help us.”

Ms. Washington writes *struct* on the board. She explains, “This is the Latin root *struct*. It means build. Many words related to building have this root. Can you think of any?” Students share *structure*. Ms. Washington writes *structure* and *construction* on the board. She smiles and continues, “Good, let me write some other words with this root.” She writes *construct*, *destructive*, *destructively*, *instructions*, and *restructure*.

Then Ms. Washington says, “Now, we are going to blend these words. Use the prefixes, suffixes and the root *struct* to help you pronounce the words.” She pauses with her finger by each word for a moment, giving students time to think of the word. She sweeps her finger in an arc under the words to have students blend the parts of the words to read them. About half of her students pronounce *destructive* incorrectly. Ms. Washington says, “Let’s pronounce this syllable by syllable.” She covers all of the syllables but *de* with a sticky note. She sweeps her finger under the syllable. Students: “/dē/.” As she moves the sticky note to reveal the next syllable, she says, “Now remember that part; we’ll come back to it.” She continues the same way for *struct* and *tive*. “Now, let’s say all the syllables together. She sweeps her finger under each syllable individually and has students say them: “/dē...struct...tiv/.” She then sweeps her finger under the entire word: “/dēstructiv/.” She runs her finger straight across under the word to indicate students should pronounce it naturally. She comments, “I like how you were able to say the syllables and then blend them into a whole word.” She continues this process with the rest of the words. After students have practiced blending all of the words with the targeted root, Ms. Washington says, “When you are reading and get to a long word that might stump you, remember to look for prefixes, suffixes, and roots that you know, and use those chunks to help you pronounce the tricky word correctly.”

Remember that we teach students these meaningful word parts to increase their stock of information so that they will be able to make intelligent choices when decoding and pronouncing unfamiliar words. After the sample lesson described above, Ms. Washington’s students will have one more option to consider when tackling a complex word.

Correcting Student Errors

Even with direct and explicit instruction in the building blocks of literacy, students who are learning to read will make mistakes in their pronunciation and spelling of words. Effective instruction in the building blocks of reading must include effective correction of student errors. In this section, we will briefly describe a few simple techniques for providing corrective feedback.

Appropriate feedback is important in all parts of the balanced literacy block. Students need us to tell them when they make mistakes so that they will not make them again. While it may be difficult for us as teachers and may make us uncomfortable, it is important that correct information be transmitted in the classroom. If we allow errors to go uncorrected, the remainder of the class either thinks you did not hear the mistake or thinks what the student said was correct. If the latter is true, a serious problem has been created. It takes several repetitions to “unlearn” incorrect information before the brain can properly process the correct information. To avoid this eventuality, we need to provide immediate corrective feedback.

When students make errors, you should address them explicitly. The LiPS Program uses the following structure:

- Identify something correct in the student’s response.
- Provide direct instruction to correct the error—the mistake is a sign that you need to explain the concept again.
- Provide a choice question that distinguishes the original error and the correct response.

Here is an example. When asked to pronounce the word *bed*, a first grade student says, “bet.” The teacher responds, “In this word, I agree that the *b* says /b/ and the *e* says /ĕ/. You said that word was /bet/. The last sound was /t/, but I see the letter *d* at the end of the word. What sound does a *d* make, /t/ or /d/?” Student: /d/. Teacher: “I agree. So, is the word /bet/ or /bed/?” Student: “/Bed/.”

There are several advantages to this procedure. First, students do not feel bad when they make a mistake because you are immediately agreeing with something they said. (Remember that student errors are generally based on misunderstandings; as they are not totally random, you will be able to find something correct in the response). Second, you address the error explicitly and do not make the student search for information he or she has not yet mastered. (If the student knew the material, the mistake would not have happened.) Third, the student ultimately produces the correct response by receiving a choice and choosing correctly. This way, the teacher makes the student responsible for the information, but with a much lower cognitive demand. By correcting student errors in this fashion, you ensure that students are continuing to receive accurate information to add to their mental stock that will help them as they learn to decode and read independently.

Review of Part Two

Part two of this text explained the methods that you will use to teach your students the building blocks of literacy. We examined how to build your students’ **book and print awareness** by modeling appropriate reading behaviors using a Big Book that all children can see; ways of developing **phonological and phonemic awareness** in your students by engaging your students in tasks that require them to hear and manipulate sounds; methods through which to teach **phonics and the alphabetic principle**, including systematically teaching sound-spelling correspondences and spelling patterns and providing opportunities for active practice in decoding; and increasing students’ **word and structural analysis** skills so that they are able to use meaningful word parts to help them read. Additionally, we discovered that effective phonics instruction does not require students to memorize rules; rather, it builds up their mental stock of information about **reliable spelling and reading patterns** so that they have options from which to choose as they decode words. In the final section, we will bring all of this information together and take a detailed look at a research-based sequence in which we teach these discrete skills.

III. Bringing It All Together – A Research-Based Scope and Sequence

In Parts One and Two, we explored the construction of English speech and print in great detail, along with the research-based methods that we will use so that our students acquire the fundamental skills that underlie the ability to read and write. In this section, we will examine a suggested scope and sequence that can guide your instruction in the building blocks of literacy. To be clear, if your school provides you with a reading program that contains a scope and sequence, use it. If it does not, then you may follow the scope and sequence provided below. Additionally, you may use this scope and sequence to help you provide assistance and remediation to struggling, older readers who may not have mastered sound-spelling correspondences and spelling patterns taught in first grade. Remember that once you have introduced a new skill, you must review it frequently throughout the remainder of the school year.

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We will begin by examining the overarching principles that explain why certain skills are taught before others (the detailed information presented in Part One will prove useful as you consider these principles). Then, we will present a suggested scope and sequence for Kindergarten through fifth grades.

Guiding Principles

Four basic principles guide us as we consider the order in which to teach these fundamental skills:

- (1) We begin by giving our students prerequisite knowledge.** Research tells us that before children can access sound-spelling relationships to decode, they must be able to hear sounds within our spoken language. After all, what is the use of knowing that *p* represents the /p/ sound if students are not able to hear that individual sound in *play*, *stomping*, or *jump*? To this end, one of our first tasks as Kindergarten and first grade teachers is to build our students' awareness of sounds in spoken language. Beyond these primary grades, we assess our students' phonological awareness and provide individualized instruction to students whose skills in this area are weak.
- (2) We teach our students the most useful information first.** We know that some letters are used more often than others. So that our students will be able to decode many words very quickly, we teach the letters that most often appear in words first. These letters (like *s*, *a*, and *t*) make up the first two groups of sound-spelling correspondences in our scope and sequence below. We teach them well before letters that appear in fewer words, such as *x*, *qu*, and *z*.
- (3) We begin by teaching the most reliable patterns and move to those that are less reliable over time.** One quality of excellent phonics instruction is that students learn to use generally reliable patterns to help them read and spell. To build our students' growing understanding of these patterns, we teach the most reliable spelling patterns first. For example, given that the long /ā/ sound (as in *game*) can be spelled in eight different ways it makes sense to teach those long /ā/ sound spelling patterns that are most reliable first. For this reason, we introduce our first grade readers to the spelling pattern *a consonant e* (*a_e* as in *game*) before the less reliable pattern *igh* (as in *weight*).
- (4) We teach what is simple, and then move to the complex.** Think back to what we learned about the development of the English phonics system over time. Do you remember what has made it so complex? The evolution of English—from simple Anglo-Saxon, to more complex assimilations of French and Latin, to the final addition of some Greek roots—has resulted in a modern English language that allows for numerous ways to spell one sound. Incredibly, the way in which children develop the ability to read and spell mirrors how the language itself developed! For this reason, we teach simple sound-spelling correspondences first (our Anglo-Saxon influences) and move to more complex patterns and morphemic units (our Latin and Greek influences) as children's skills develop. Likewise, this principle explains why we structure our phonological awareness in a way that asks children to hear and pronounce simpler sounds and combinations of sounds, before more complex ones, as you see reflected in the scope and sequence below.

With these four principles in mind, take a look at the suggested scope and sequence for Kindergarten-fifth grade.

Grade Level & Time of Year	Phonological and Phonemic Awareness ⁶⁵	Letter Name & Identification	Sound-Spelling Correspondence																																																												
<p>Kindergarten, Days 1-70</p>	<p>Listen attentively to different types of sounds</p> <p>Listen to rhymes</p> <p>Recite rhymes</p> <p>Anticipate rhyming words (when singing or reciting rhymes, like “Down By the Bay”)</p> <p>Generate rhyming words</p> <p>Hear and distinguish between short and long words</p> <p>Hear and count words in sentences</p> <p>Clapping syllables in familiar words</p>	<p>Identify, name, and write all 26 alphabet letters</p>	<p>None</p>																																																												
<p>Kindergarten, Days 71-180</p>	<p>All of the above, plus:</p> <p>Recognize and use sentences to express a complete thought</p> <p>Recognize that a sentence is made up of a combination of individual words</p> <p>Recognize that a sentence is meaningful because of its words and the order in which they are spoken</p> <p>Put syllables together to make a word</p> <p>Recognize that words contain individual sounds</p> <p>Repeat individual sounds</p> <p>Isolate initial sounds</p> <p>Determine which word in a group has an “odd” sound</p> <p>Delete particular sounds in a word</p> <p>Add particular sounds to a word</p> <p>Segment sounds—pull apart each sound in a word</p>	<p>Review all 26 alphabet letter names</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2" data-bbox="1149 808 1408 840">Group One</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 840 1312 871">/p/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 840 1408 871">p</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 871 1312 903">/s/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 871 1408 903">s</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 903 1312 934">/ă/ as in <i>pat</i></td> <td data-bbox="1312 903 1408 934">a</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 934 1312 966">/t/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 934 1408 966">t</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 966 1312 997">/l/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 966 1408 997">l</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 997 1312 1029">/b/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 997 1408 1029">b</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1029 1312 1060">/i/ as in <i>tip</i></td> <td data-bbox="1312 1029 1408 1060">i</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1060 1312 1092">/d/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1060 1408 1092">d</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1092 1312 1123">/k/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1092 1408 1123">c</td> </tr> <tr> <th colspan="2" data-bbox="1149 1123 1408 1155">Group Two</th> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1155 1312 1186">/m/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1155 1408 1186">m</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1186 1312 1218">/r/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1186 1408 1218">r</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1218 1312 1249">/ĕ/ as in <i>pet</i></td> <td data-bbox="1312 1218 1408 1249">e</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1249 1312 1281">/f/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1249 1408 1281">f</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1281 1312 1312">/g/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1281 1408 1312">g</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1312 1312 1344">/n/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1312 1408 1344">n</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1344 1312 1375">/k/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1344 1408 1375">k</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1375 1312 1407">/ŭ/ as in <i>bug</i></td> <td data-bbox="1312 1375 1408 1407">u</td> </tr> <tr> <th colspan="2" data-bbox="1149 1407 1408 1438">Group Three</th> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1438 1312 1470">/h/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1438 1408 1470">h</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1470 1312 1501">/j/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1470 1408 1501">j</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1501 1312 1533">/w/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1501 1408 1533">w</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1533 1312 1564">/ō/ as in <i>hog</i></td> <td data-bbox="1312 1533 1408 1564">o</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1564 1312 1596">/v/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1564 1408 1596">v</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1596 1312 1627">/y/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1596 1408 1627">y</td> </tr> <tr> <th colspan="2" data-bbox="1149 1627 1408 1659">Group Four</th> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1659 1312 1690">/kw/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1659 1408 1690">qu</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1690 1312 1722">/ks/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1690 1408 1722">x</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1149 1722 1312 1751">/z/</td> <td data-bbox="1312 1722 1408 1751">z</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Group One		/p/	p	/s/	s	/ă/ as in <i>pat</i>	a	/t/	t	/l/	l	/b/	b	/i/ as in <i>tip</i>	i	/d/	d	/k/	c	Group Two		/m/	m	/r/	r	/ĕ/ as in <i>pet</i>	e	/f/	f	/g/	g	/n/	n	/k/	k	/ŭ/ as in <i>bug</i>	u	Group Three		/h/	h	/j/	j	/w/	w	/ō/ as in <i>hog</i>	o	/v/	v	/y/	y	Group Four		/kw/	qu	/ks/	x	/z/	z
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Grade Level & Time of Year	Letter Name & Identification, Phonemic and Phonological Awareness ⁶⁶	Sound-Spelling Correspondence	Spelling Patterns, Conventions or Morphemes																	
Grade 1, Days 1-10	Review all 26 alphabet letter names Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 1-70, above)	None	None																	
Grade 1, Days 11-20	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group One	None																	
		<table border="0"> <tr><td>/p/</td><td>p</td></tr> <tr><td>/s/</td><td>s</td></tr> <tr><td>/ă/ as in <i>pat</i></td><td>a</td></tr> <tr><td>/t/</td><td>t</td></tr> <tr><td>/l/</td><td>l, ll</td></tr> <tr><td>/b/</td><td>b</td></tr> <tr><td>/ī/ as in <i>tip</i></td><td>i</td></tr> <tr><td>/d/</td><td>d</td></tr> <tr><td>/k/</td><td>c</td></tr> </table>		/p/	p	/s/	s	/ă/ as in <i>pat</i>	a	/t/	t	/l/	l, ll	/b/	b	/ī/ as in <i>tip</i>	i	/d/	d	/k/
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/d/	d																			
/k/	c																			
Grade 1, Days 21-30	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group Two	None																	
		<table border="0"> <tr><td>/m/</td><td>m</td></tr> <tr><td>/r/</td><td>r</td></tr> <tr><td>/ĕ/ as in <i>pet</i></td><td>e</td></tr> <tr><td>/f/</td><td>f, ff</td></tr> <tr><td>/g/</td><td>g</td></tr> <tr><td>/n/</td><td>n</td></tr> <tr><td>/k/</td><td>k, ck</td></tr> <tr><td>/ŭ/ as in <i>bug</i></td><td>u</td></tr> </table>		/m/	m	/r/	r	/ĕ/ as in <i>pet</i>	e	/f/	f, ff	/g/	g	/n/	n	/k/	k, ck	/ŭ/ as in <i>bug</i>	u	
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/ŭ/ as in <i>bug</i>	u																			
Grade 1, Days 31-40	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group Three	None																	
		<table border="0"> <tr><td>/h/</td><td>h</td></tr> <tr><td>/j/</td><td>j, -dge</td></tr> <tr><td>/w/</td><td>w</td></tr> <tr><td>/ō/ as in <i>hog</i></td><td>o</td></tr> <tr><td>/v/</td><td>v</td></tr> <tr><td>/y/</td><td>y</td></tr> <tr><td>/d/</td><td>-ed</td></tr> <tr><td>/t/</td><td>-ed</td></tr> <tr><td>/kw/</td><td>qu</td></tr> <tr><td>/ks/</td><td>x</td></tr> </table>		/h/	h	/j/	j, -dge	/w/	w	/ō/ as in <i>hog</i>	o	/v/	v	/y/	y	/d/	-ed	/t/	-ed	/kw/
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Grade 1, Days 41-50	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group Four	/ā/ spelled <i>a</i> and <i>a_e</i> (as in <i>lady</i> and <i>fame</i>) /ō/ spelled <i>o</i> and <i>o_e</i> (as in <i>motor</i> and <i>phone</i>)																	
		<table border="0"> <tr><td>/z/</td><td>z, _s, zz</td></tr> <tr><td>/s/</td><td>ss, ce</td></tr> <tr><td>/ch/</td><td>ch, tch</td></tr> <tr><td>/th/</td><td>th</td></tr> <tr><td>/sh/</td><td>sh</td></tr> <tr><td>/wh/</td><td>wh</td></tr> </table>		/z/	z, _s, zz	/s/	ss, ce	/ch/	ch, tch	/th/	th	/sh/	sh	/wh/	wh					
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Grade 1, Days 51-60	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group Six		/ē/ spelled <i>e</i> and <i>ee</i> (as in <i>rewind</i> and <i>feed</i>) /ī/ spelled <i>i</i> and <i>i_e</i> (as in <i>miner</i> and <i>time</i>) /ū/ spelled <i>u</i> and <i>u_e</i> (as in <i>future</i> and <i>cute</i>)
		/ng/ /ar/	ng ar	
Grade 1, Days 61-70	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group Seven		/ī/ spelled <i>_y</i> , <i>igh</i> , and <i>_ie</i> (as in <i>sky</i> , <i>light</i> , and <i>pie</i>)
		/n/ /r/ /er/	kn wr er, ir, ur	
Grade 1, Days 71-80	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group Eight		/ā/ spelled <i>_ay</i> and <i>ai_</i> (as in <i>May</i> and <i>pain</i>) /ē/ spelled <i>ea</i> , <i>_y</i> , and <i>_ey</i> (as in <i>each</i> , <i>sunny</i> , and <i>key</i>) /ō/ spelled <i>oa</i> and <i>_ow</i> (as in <i>boat</i> and <i>slow</i>)
		/l/	_le	
Grade 1, Days 81-90	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group Nine		/ō/ spelled <i>_oe</i> (as in <i>toe</i>) /ū/ spelled <i>_ue</i> (as in <i>blue</i>)
		/j/ /s/ /or/	ge, gi ci or, ore	
Grade 1, Days 91-100	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks as needed (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group Ten		/oi/ spelled <i>oi_</i> and <i>_oy</i> (as in <i>boil</i> and <i>toy</i>) /ow/ spelled <i>ou_</i> and <i>ow</i> (as in <i>out</i> and <i>plow</i>)
		/f/	ph	
Grade 1, Days 101-110	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks as needed (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group Eleven		/ū/ spelled <i>_ew</i> (as in <i>flew</i>) /aw/ spelled <i>au_</i> and <i>aw</i> (as in <i>haul</i> and <i>claw</i>)
		/m/ /v/	mb ve	
Grade 1, Days 111-120	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks as needed (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	None		/oo/ spelled <i>oo</i> , <i>u</i> , and <i>u_e</i> (as in <i>cool</i> , <i>tutor</i> , and <i>flute</i>)
Grade 1, Days 121-130	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks as needed (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group Twelve		Short /oo/ spelled <i>oo</i> (as in <i>brook</i>)
		/ĕ/ as in <i>head</i>	ea	
Grade 1, Days 131-140	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks as needed (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	None		Long /oo/ spelled <i>_ue</i> and <i>ew</i> (as in <i>sue</i> and <i>flew</i>)
Grade 1, Days 141-150	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks as needed (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group Thirteen		None Simple contractions (like <i>don't</i> or <i>I'm</i>)
		/j/ /s/	gy cy	
Grade 1, Days 151-160	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks as needed (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	None		/ē/ spelled <i>_ie_</i> (as in <i>chieĀ</i>)

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Grade 1, Days 161-170	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks as needed (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	Group Fourteen		/shun/ spelled <i>-tion</i> (as in <i>nation</i>)
		/ng/	n	
Grade 1, Days 171-180	Review phonological and phonemic awareness tasks as needed (see those listed in Kindergarten, Days 71-180, above)	None		None

Keep in mind that we do not expect first graders to spell all of the patterns that they have learned with complete accuracy. However, we should continue to improve students' spelling by referring them to the patterns so that they will accumulate knowledge that will lead eventually to conventional spelling.

Grade Level & Time of Year	Sound-Spelling Correspondence		Spelling Patterns, Conventions or Morphemes
Grade 2, Days 1-20	/p/ /s/ /ă/ as in <i>pat</i> /t/ /l/ /b/ /i/ as in <i>tip</i> /d/ /k/ /m/ /r/ /ĕ/ as in <i>pet</i> /f/ /g/ /n/ /k/ /ŭ/ as in <i>bug</i> /h/ /w/ /ŏ/ as in <i>hog</i> /v/ /y/	p s a t l, ll b i d c m r e f, ff g n k, ck u h w o v y	/ā/ spelled <i>a_e</i> (as in <i>fame</i>) /ō/ spelled <i>o_e</i> and <i>_oe</i> (as in <i>phone</i> and <i>toe</i>) /ē/ spelled <i>e_e</i> and <i>ee</i> (as in <i>theme</i> and <i>feed</i>) /ī/ spelled <i>i_e</i> and <i>_ie</i> (as in <i>time</i> and <i>tie</i>) /ū/ spelled <i>u_e</i> and <i>_ue</i> (as in <i>cute</i> and <i>cue</i>) Word Endings (<i>-ing</i>)
Grade 2, Days 21-40	/d/ /t/ /j/ /kw/ /ks/ /z/ /s/ /ch/ /th/ /sh/ /wh/ /f/	-ed -ed j, -dge qu x z, _s, zz ss, ce ch, tch th sh wh ph	/ā/ spelled <i>_ay</i> and <i>ai_</i> (as in <i>May</i> and <i>pain</i>) /ē/ spelled <i>ea, _y,</i> and <i>_ey</i> (as in <i>each, sunny,</i> and <i>key</i>) /ō/ spelled <i>oa</i> and <i>_ow</i> (as in <i>boat</i> and <i>slow</i>) Simple compound words (<i>doghouse</i>) Closed syllables in two syllable words

Grade Level & Time of Year	Sound-Spelling Correspondence		Spelling Patterns, Conventions or Morphemes
Grade 2, Days 41-60	/ng/ /ar/ /n/ /r/ /er/ /j/ /s/ /or/	ng ar kn wr er, ir, ur ge, gi ci or, ore	Open syllables in two syllable words /ā/ spelled <i>a</i> (as in <i>lady</i>) /ō/ spelled <i>o</i> (as in <i>motor</i>) /ē/ spelled <i>e</i> (as in <i>rewind</i>) /ī/ spelled <i>i</i> (as in <i>miner</i>) /ū/ spelled <i>u</i> (as in <i>future</i>) /ū/ spelled <i>_ew</i> (as in <i>flew</i>) /ē/ spelled <i>_ie_</i> (as in <i>chieŕ</i>) /ī/ spelled <i>y</i> and <i>igh</i> (as in <i>sky</i> and <i>light</i>) /oi/ spelled <i>oi_</i> and <i>_oy</i> (as in <i>boil</i> and <i>toy</i>) /ow/ spelled <i>ou_</i> and <i>ow</i> (as in <i>out</i> and <i>plow</i>)
Grade 2, Days 61-80	/l/ /m/ /v/	_le mb ve	Open and Closed Syllables /aw/ spelled <i>au_</i> and <i>aw</i> (as in <i>haul</i> and <i>claw</i>) Short /oo/ spelled <i>oo</i> (as in <i>brook</i>) /oo/ spelled <i>oo</i> , <i>u</i> , and <i>u_e</i> (as in <i>cool</i> , <i>tutor</i> , and <i>flute</i>) Contractions (like <i>we're</i> or <i>won't</i>) Word Endings (/shun/ spelled <i>-tion</i>)
Grade 2, Days 81-100	/j/ /s/	gy cy	Open and Closed Syllables /ē/ spelled <i>ea</i> as in <i>head</i> Long /oo/ spelled <i>_ue</i> and <i>ew</i> (as in <i>sue</i> and <i>flew</i>) Word Endings (<i>-er</i> , <i>-est</i> , /cher/ spelled <i>-ture</i>) Homophones (<i>to</i> , <i>too</i> , <i>two</i> ; <i>there</i> , <i>their</i>)
Grade 2, Days 101-120	/ng/ /ol/	n al (as in <i>fall</i>)	Word Endings (<i>-ly</i>) Hyphenated words
Grade 2, Days 121-140	/s/	tl (as in <i>whistle</i>)	Add an <i>e</i> to distinguish words that end with a plural form from words that merely end with the /s/ sound (<i>mouse</i> , <i>lease</i>). Prefixes (<i>un-</i> , <i>re-</i>)
Grade 2, Days 141-160	None		Schwa (the /u/ in <i>nation</i>) Prefixes (<i>pre-</i> , <i>dis-</i>) Word Endings: (<i>-ous</i>)
Grade 2, Days 161-180	None		/aw/ spelled <i>ough</i> and <i>ough</i> (as in <i>caught</i> and <i>thought</i>)

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Grade Level & Time of Year	Sound-Spelling Correspondence	Spelling Patterns, Conventions or Morphemes
Grade 3, Days 1-30	Short Vowels Consonant Digraphs	Long Vowel Spelling Patterns Vowel Diphthongs and Digraphs (/ow/, /aw/, /oi/, long /oo/, short /oo/) More complex compound words (<i>fifty-one</i>) Word endings: (-ed, -ing, -s, -ful, -er, -ly, -tion)
Grade 3, Days 31-60	/l/ spelled <i>_le</i> /m/ spelled <i>mb</i> /sk/ spelled <i>sch</i>	Open and Closed Syllables Vowel Diphthongs and Digraphs R-Controlled Vowels Plural form of words ending in <i>y</i> Prefixes: (<i>re-</i> , <i>un-</i> , <i>dis-</i>) Word endings: (-tion, -ous, -ment)
Grade 3, Days 61-90	/or/ spelled <i>ore</i> /n/ spelled <i>kn</i> and <i>gn</i>	/ā/ spelled <i>ei</i> , <i>eigh</i> , <i>_ey</i> (as in <i>vein</i> , <i>weigh</i> , <i>they</i>) Prefixes: (<i>pre-</i> , <i>mis-</i> , <i>de-</i>) Schwa (the /u/ in <i>nation</i>) Word endings: (-ness, -less)
Grade 3, Days 91-120	/wuh/ spelled <i>wo</i> (as in <i>wonder</i>) /s/ spelled <i>sc</i>	/aw/ spelled <i>ough</i> and <i>ough</i> (as in <i>caught</i> and <i>thought</i>) short /oo/ spelled <i>u</i> (as in <i>pull</i>) Prefixes: (<i>bi-</i> , <i>trans-</i>) Word endings: (-ial, -ic, -able, -ible)
Grade 3, Days 121-150	waw/ spelled <i>wa</i> (as in <i>wander</i>)	/ē/ spelled <i>ei</i> and <i>_ey</i> (as in <i>receive</i> and <i>turkey</i>) Word endings: (-ion, -ian, , ative, ation)
Grade 3, Days 151-180	/m/ spelled <i>lm</i> (as in <i>calm</i>)	/oo/ spelled <i>ou</i> (as in <i>bouquet</i>) Word endings: (-tial, -sion says /zhun/)

Grade Level & Time of Year	Sound-Spelling Correspondence	Spelling Patterns, Conventions or Morphemes
Grade 4	Review and remediate sound-symbol correspondences as necessary (often with small groups of struggling readers)	<p>Review and remediate previously taught spelling patterns as necessary (often with small groups of struggling readers)</p> <p><i>X</i> says /z/ at the beginning of a word (xylophone)</p> <p><i>X</i> says /gz/ in the middle of a word</p> <p><i>QUE</i> says /k/ in the middle or end of a word</p> <p><i>IQUE</i> says /k/ in the middle or at the end of a word (<i>antique</i>)</p> <p>Common Latin roots, prefixes, and suffixes (see the table on page 103 for most frequently used prefixes and suffixes)</p> <p>Complex suffixes (<i>-ous, -ia, -ian, -ion, -ious, -ient, -ience, -tion, -tious, -tient, -tience, -tio, -sion, -cion, -cient, -cient</i>)</p>

Grade Level & Time of Year	Sound-Spelling Correspondence	Spelling Patterns, Conventions or Morphemes
Grade 5	Review and remediate sound-symbol correspondences as necessary (often with small groups of struggling readers)	<p>Review and remediate previously taught spelling patterns as necessary (often with small groups of struggling readers)</p> <p><i>Y</i> says /i/ in the middle of a word (of Greek origin) (<i>mystery</i>)</p> <p>Additional Latin roots, prefixes, and suffixes, as well as the few Greek roots that appear in math or science content</p> <p>Other Language Influences (American Indian, Spanish, French, German sources of words)</p>

Conclusion

As we have seen, the building blocks of literacy are both critical and complex. This chapter had two broad purposes. First, we aimed to provide you with a wealth of background information about the structure of the written and spoken English language that will prepare you to teach your Kindergarten through fifth grade students to read.

- Understanding **phonetics**—how individual consonant and vowel sounds are produced—helps us to provide precise information as we teach students to pronounce new sounds or help struggling students articulate correctly a sound they have already learned.
- The **alphabetic principle** is the use of letters or letter combinations to represent sounds. Only a few sound-spelling relationships are predictable and invariant; the majority are **predictable but variant**, meaning one sound can be spelled multiple ways depending on a variety of influences.
- The English language developed over time and has been strongly influenced by the **Anglo-Saxon, Norman French, Latin, and Greek** languages.
- **Spelling patterns** are influenced by the **position of a sound in a word, what surrounds the sound, the location of a sound within a syllable, common English conventions, the language of origin, and the morphological structure** in the word.

The Building Blocks of Literacy

Our second purpose was to provide a general scope and sequence for instruction in the building blocks of literacy and to explain the most effective methods by which to deliver that instruction.

- Students need to develop **book and print awareness** early in their school careers by learning how to turn pages, the function of parts of the book, and that print progresses from left-to-right, for example.
- Beginning readers must acquire critical **phonological and phonemic awareness** skills. Students must be able to hear and manipulate sentences, words, syllables, and individual sounds; competency in these areas is a prerequisite for successful reading in later years.
- To decode effectively, students must understand and be able to use **phonics and the alphabetic principle**. Thus, they need to be able to **identify and name letters, understand and use sound-symbol correspondences, practice and review phonics skills through reading and spelling, and read high frequency words automatically**.
- Students' ability to decode improves from a working understanding of the **structure of the English language**, including its meaningful parts such as **prefixes, suffixes, and roots**.
- The most effective and efficient way to teach students to read is to provide **direct, explicit, and systematic phonics instruction**.

Teach phonics all the time. Be systematic and comprehensive about it. If YOU learned using the whole language approach, sit down for a couple hours, learn your short vowels, your long vowels, your blends, diphthongs and diagraphs. Stress the importance of word chunking and syllabication. Children with learning disabilities need phonics all the time. If you can organize it for yourself and them, you will be amazed at their progress.

Ellen Tuzzolo, New Orleans '01
Associate Director of Southern Initiatives,
The Justice Policy Institute

We concluded the chapter by examining a suggested scope and sequence.

- As a general rule, teach students the letters, sound-letter relationships, spelling patterns, and meaningful word parts that are **simple and are the most useful and reliable first**. Over time, build on students' understanding by teaching letters and patterns that are less frequent and reliable and are more complex.

Reading Fluency: A Bridge from Decoding to Comprehension

Chapter Four

- I. What Is Reading Fluency?
- II. Building Students' Reading Fluency

Listen in as three third-grade students read aloud to their teacher during one-on-one conferences. The first student opens a book from Mary Pope Osbourne's *The Magic Tree House* series and reads, "Jack sat up in bed. He started out... he stared out his window. The sky was dark gray. The sun would be rising soon." Changing the sound of her voice a bit, this student continues, "'It's almost time,' he whispered to himself." It takes her about fifteen seconds to read the first half of this page of the story.

Related Readings

Along with this chapter, please read the excerpt located in the Related Readings section at the end of this text:

- Put Reading First, pp. 27-37

The second student begins his chosen book, reading, "Corduroy... is ... a... bear... who one... lived... one lived... once lived...in the... toy de... depart... department... department... of a... big... store." It takes him about one full minute to read the first sentence of the story.

The third student opens Judy Blume's *Freckle Juice* and reads, "Andrew Marcus wanted freckles Nicky Lane had freckles he had about a million of them they covered his face his ears and the back of his neck." In approximately seven seconds, she has read the first four sentences of chapter one.

What separates these three readers from one another? The third grader who is beginning *The Magic Tree House* reads naturally, similar to how she talks. If she makes a mistake, she is able to correct it quickly so that the text makes sense. When reading dialogue, she modifies her voice to sound like the character, bringing the story to life with dramatic flourish. The second student reads word-by-word, in a monotone voice. Though he decodes all the words correctly, it's clear that he still has to spend a lot of energy figuring out those words; decoding has not become an automatic process for him. For as long as decoding remains so labor intensive, his ability to think about and understand what he's read will be severely hampered. Finally, though we often associate low reading fluency with choppy, plodding reading, the student who races through *Freckle Juice* with no attention to punctuation or phrasing will have a very difficult time grasping the meaning of the story as well.

In this chapter, we will take a closer look at reading fluency. First, we will consider the component skills of fluency. Then, we will examine four broad ways to build students' reading fluency and discuss a variety of effective instructional methods and techniques. In addition to recommendations from the National Reading Panel, many of these methods are recommended by fluency expert and reading researcher Timothy Rasinski in his book, *The Fluent Reader*.

Decoding				Comprehension		
Book and Print Awareness	Phonological and Phonemic Awareness	Phonics and The Alphabetic Principle	Word and Structural Analysis	Fluency		
				Sight Words	Automaticity	Phrasing
				Background Knowledge	Vocabulary	Comprehension Strategies

Reading Fluency

I. What Is Reading Fluency?

As you will remember from Chapter One, reading fluency is the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with expression. The umbrella skill of **fluency** can be broken down into **automaticity** (rapid and automatic word recognition) and **prosody** (reading with phrasing and recognition of punctuation). One way some teachers help students understand the concept of fluency, and reflect on whether or not they are fluent readers, is to ask, “did you read it as naturally as you talk?”

Fluency is one of the key indicators of a proficient reader, as it is necessary for true comprehension of a text. As explained earlier, if a student spends time sounding out words or stringing syllables together, her slowed pace prevents her from being able to focus on the overall meaning of what she is reading. Research shows that “since the average individual can hold only seven to ten bits of information in short-term memory, the disfluent reader expends cognitive energy primarily on figuring out words and pronunciations. This leaves little memory capacity to focus on comprehending the information.”⁶⁷ When a reader’s decoding skills are automatic, her cognitive energy can be spent on making meaning of the text. Because they don’t have to focus on decoding words, they can use all of their energy to think critically about what a story means. Truly, fluency is the bridge that takes readers from simply decoding words to understanding and enjoying whole texts.

Fluent readers put several component skills into action while they read a text on their independent level (you may want to revisit the discussion of an independent reading level in chapter two). First, they instantly recognize the great majority of words and common phrases in the text, and they use their phonics skills to quickly decode the few unknown words that they encounter. Second, fluent readers are expressive! They group words together in meaningful units such as phrases and clauses and are able to pause at appropriate places within and at the end of sentences. Finally, fluent readers change the tone of their voice and vary the emphasis they place on words by paying attention to punctuation. Consider how a fluent reader raises his voice slightly when reading a question, while the less fluent reader reads each word with the same tone and emphasis, seeming to ignore the question mark at the end of a sentence.

It takes a great deal of time to develop reading fluency; students must practice again and again with texts that are on their independent level. We *expect* our earliest readers to read in a choppy, word-by-word manner, as they are just learning to decode and thus need to spend all of their energy connecting sounds to letters and blending those letter sounds together to form words. Even as their decoding skills improve, students’ fluency will change depending on their familiarity with the topic of a given text. A skilled adult reader may need to slow her reading rate significantly if she is reading an entirely unfamiliar text (perhaps an article from an aerospace engineering textbook). Though reading rates can vary according to texts, we have a good sense of how many words-per-minute our students should be able to read at each grade level. The chart on the next page outlines targeted reading rate norms for grades one through five in the fall, winter, and spring.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Block, Cathy Collins and Michael Pressley. *Comprehension Instruction: Research-Based Best Practices*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2002.

⁶⁸ Table adapted from *Assessing Reading Fluency* by Timothy V. Rasinski, www.prel.org/products/re_/assessing-fluency.htm, accessed 7/10/2010.

Grade	Fall (Words Correct Per Minute)	Winter (Words Correct Per Minute)	Spring (Words Correct Per Minute)
1		10-30	30-60
2	30-60	50-80	70-100
3	50-90	70-100	80-110
4	70-110	80-120	100-140
5	80-120	100-140	110-150

Source: Adapted from "AIMSweb: Charting the Path to Literacy," 2003, EdInformation, Inc. Available at www.aimsweb.com/norms/reading_fluency.htm. Data are also adapted from "Curriculum-Based Oral Reading Fluency Norms for Students in Grades 2 Through 5," by J. E. Hasbrouck and G. Tindal, 1992, *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 24, pp. 41-44.

Our instructional goal is for **all of our students to read as naturally and expressively as they talk**. The rest of this chapter is devoted to showing you how to reach this goal with your students.

II. Building Students' Reading Fluency

Many struggling readers believe that what defines good readers is their ability to read all of the words on a page without making a mistake. To move students from this limited understanding of what good reading is to the ability to read with the fluency that is necessary for comprehension, teachers use four broad methods⁶⁹:

1. **Model good oral reading.**
2. **Teach students phrasing to develop fluency.**
3. **Offer many opportunities for students to practice with guidance and support.**
4. **Track students' fluency over time.**

Let's take a more in-depth look at each of these methods and how they are used in the classroom.

Model Good Oral Reading

As you've likely begun to understand, all effective direct instruction begins with a teacher modeling what he or she wants students to be able to do. Instruction in fluency is no different. The more that students hear a reader using appropriate phrasing, reading quickly and accurately, and using expression in his or her voice, the more quickly students will understand what fluent reading actually is. Teachers take their modeling a step further by providing both examples and non-examples of fluent reading. Fluency expert Timothy Rasinski notes:

When you draw attention to how you're reading, you help students see that meaning in reading is carried not only in the words, but also in the way the words are expressed. For example, you might contrast a fluent rendition of a passage with a disfluent, labored, and word-by-word reading of it, then ask the students which reading they preferred and why. Without a doubt, the students will pick the more fluent reading. This becomes an important lesson in how they should read orally when given the opportunity.⁷⁰

The daily Read Aloud is a perfect opportunity to model what fluent reading sounds like. When you use a special voice for a particular character, take a breath between phrases, or pause dramatically at the end of a suspenseful sentence, you are saying to students, "This is what it sounds like in my head when I read.

⁶⁹ Rasinski, Timothy V. *The Fluent Reader: Oral Reading Strategies for Building Word Recognition, Fluency and Comprehension*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2003, pp. 26-33.

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 26-27.

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You are working to sound just like me when you read!” In addition to the Read Aloud, you can start your Shared Reading of a poem or story, for instance, by modeling how it should sound. In *Put Reading First*, the National Reading Panel explains:

By pointing to each word as you are reading, you can show students where and how you are pausing and how the text shows you when to raise and lower your voice. Occasionally, you can also explain to your students why you are reading in a certain way:

Teacher: Did you hear how my voice got louder and more excited right here? That's because the author put in this exclamation mark (pointing to it) to show that the speaker was excited or enthusiastic about what she was saying.

Then, have the students practice reading the same text.⁷¹

Modeling fluent reading aloud for your students is a method you'll use everyday to help build your students' fluency skills.

Teach Students Phrasing to Develop Fluency

Most students who struggle to read fluently are trapped in a pattern of reading everything... word... by... word. As we saw with our *Corduroy* reader, students who read word-by-word often miss the meaning of the text because it's most often found in its phrases, not in individual words.⁷² When we speak, others can hear our phrases because we pause and change the intonation or inflection of our voices. Rasinski provides the following example as an illustration:

Say the following sentence to yourself aloud in a way that means the principal, not the teacher, is the “best in the school district”:

The principal said the teacher is the best in the school district.

Notice how inflections and intonations in your voice helped mark how the text should be phrased. You probably stressed the word “principal,” and your voice's pitch lowered at the phrase “said the teacher.” Now try the same sentence in a way that declares the teacher as “the best” by the principal. Notice how your intonation changed to convey the different meaning.⁷³

When we read silently, punctuation provides the cues for correct phrasing, though readers sometimes have to rely on their understanding of speech patterns to make this determination. To help our students read with appropriate phrasing, we have to teach them to use punctuation cues when available and to make inferences when such cues are not present. We'll look at two ways to do this.

The first is through **repeated reading of high-frequency phrases**. Many teachers have their students repeatedly read high-frequency words, and there is value in doing a limited amount of this kind of practice. However, given that meaning is most often conveyed through groups of words, rather than individual words, it makes sense to provide students with brief, daily doses of practice in reading these high-frequency words in phrases.

⁷¹ *Put Reading First*. National Institute for Literacy, 2003.

⁷² Rasinski, Timothy V. *The Fluent Reader: Oral Reading Strategies for Building Word Recognition, Fluency and Comprehension*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2003, p. 32.

⁷³ *Ibid* p. 33.

Incorporating Fry's 300 "instant words," which contain about two-thirds of all words that students will find in their reading, Rasinski created three lists of phrases and short sentences for repetitive reading

Guidelines for Repeated Reading of High-Frequency Phrases

1. Determine which list to use. Ideally, first graders should learn the phrases on the first list, second graders the phrases on the second, and so on. However, if many of your students have not mastered high-frequency words representative of earlier grades, start with an earlier list.
2. Each week, write five to ten phrases from the list on a chart.
3. Practice reading the phrases chorally with your students several times a day, perhaps incorporating them into your daily routines.
4. Continue daily repeated reading of the phrases throughout the year, returning to practice those introduced at the beginning of the year.⁷⁴

practice in the classroom. Some examples include, "So there you are," "Now and then," "Three years ago," and "In the beginning." Given that students learn around 100 high-frequency words a year, first through third grade teachers can provide systematic practice in all of the phrases on one list each year, ensuring that by the end of third grade, students are able to read these common words with correct phrasing. Depending on students' needs, fourth and fifth grade teachers may ask struggling readers to repeatedly practice these phrases in small groups or individually. For lists of phrases for repeated reading practice, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 36-38: "Phrases and Short Sentences for Repeated Reading Practice"); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✕

Another method for teaching phrasing is **the Phrased Text Lesson** (PTL), which takes place over the course of several instructional days and teaches students to use explicit and implicit cues to chunk the text into meaningful groups of words. (Our *Freckle Juice* reader would benefit from this kind of instruction.) Originally designed for use with individual students or small groups, it can be modified to use with a whole class of second through fifth graders. Rasinski describes the lesson as follows:

To prepare, select short reading passages and mark or "cue" phrase boundaries for the reader. I generally choose 100-word segments from texts students have recently read or will read in the near future. With a pencil, I mark phrase boundaries with slash marks—single slashes for within-sentence boundaries (indicating a short pause) and double slashes for sentence boundaries (indicating a longer pause)...

On the first day of using PTL, make a copy of the phrase-cued text for each student. Begin the lesson by passing out the text to students, discussing the importance of reading in phrasal units, and explaining the purpose of the marks on the text. From there, read the text to the students a few times, emphasizing and slightly exaggerating the phrases. Then read the text chorally with students a few times, in meaningful phrases. Finally, ask students to pair up for two to three rounds of repeated reading. End day one of the PTL by having students perform their text

Example of a Phrase-Cued Text

Today, / there is a park / in Hiroshima / where the bomb dropped. // Near the park / is a museum. // It opened in 1955 / and houses / some 6000 items / left after the explosion. //
Each year / 1,200,000 people / visit the museum. // They look / at the photos and exhibits. // And / they examine / the twisted roof tiles / and melted bottles. // They are / strange disturbing relics / of that terrible moment. //
Japan has built / a new wing / to the museum. // The new exhibit / includes Japan's role in World War II / and shows / how the city of Hiroshima / participated in the military effort. // For the first time, / the bombing is placed / in a historical context. //
From *Hiroshima* by Laurence Yep, 1995.

⁷⁴ Ibid pp. 99-100.

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for the (small) group. Students are often amazed at how fluent and meaningful their reading has become.

On the next day, repeat everything you did the day before, using the original text without phrase boundaries. This helps students transfer the knowledge they gained using phrase-cued text to conventionally formatted text. Over time, students develop their understanding of how texts are phrased and apply that understanding to new, never-before-seen passages.⁷⁵

By participating weekly in repeated readings of high-frequency phrases and in Phrased Text Lessons, your students will show marked improvement in their ability to use phrasing to increase their fluency and comprehension.

Offer Many Opportunities for Students to Read Orally with Guidance and Support

While teacher modeling and direct instruction in phrasing are first instructional steps, students must have many opportunities to practice reading aloud with support if they are going to become fluent readers. **Repeated reading** is one of the most effective ways to offer lots of practice to students; this instructional method has been proven to help students recall information from their reading, improve their comprehension, increase their reading rates, and change from word-by-word reading to reading with meaningful phrases. And this makes sense—the more time a student spends reading one text, the better his or her reading of that text will be. But there is a more compelling finding that leads us to advocate repeated reading as the practice method of choice. Researchers have found that when students repeatedly read a text, not only is their reading of that particular text improved, but their first readings of new, unseen passages are significantly improved as well. To ensure success, students must repeatedly read a text that is on their independent level (they can read it with 95% accuracy). Therefore, you must have a stock of leveled texts with which students can practice. To determine the difficulty of a text or passage, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 39-40: “How to Determine Passage Difficulty and Reading Rate”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

Simply asking students to read the same book multiple times without support will do little to improve their fluency, however. To make repeated reading an effective instructional activity, we must provide students with guidance and support and find ways to keep students engaged. We’ll consider four ways to provide varying levels of support to students during repeated readings - **choral reading, echo reading, buddy reading, and tape recorded reading**. Though you will certainly not use all of the examples that follow on any given day, you should integrate fluency-building activities during Shared Reading on a daily basis.

Choral Reading

As its name implies, choral reading involves all of the students in a class reading a common text aloud with the teacher. The voices of fluent readers—both the teacher and other classmates—guide students who are struggling. In one third-grade classroom, students chorally read a new poem, as well as familiar favorites, several times a day. Their teacher notes that her struggling readers “seem to get the cue from the other readers in the class. We’ll read a poem once, twice, three times a day or even more. And each time we read, their voices get stronger and more confident. Even the children who have the most difficult time in reading can read by the third time through. After listening to their classmates read and then reading (along with) their classmates, many struggling readers come up to me near the end of the day and read the poem out loud on their own.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Ibid pp. 140-141.

⁷⁶ Ibid pp. 58-59.

There are many variations of choral reading that can keep your students interested and engaged as they build their fluency:

- **Refrain.** In refrain choral reading, one student or the teacher reads most of the text, and the whole group joins in to read key segments chorally. Write texts like these on chart paper and use a different colored marker to make the whole-class refrain stand out visually.
- **Dialogue.** Similar to reader's theater (discussed below), an individual student or groups of students read particular speaking parts. For example, you might assign half of your class to read the part of the narrator, and the other half to read the part of the cat in a choral reading of "Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat":
NARRATOR: Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been?
CAT: I've been to London to see the Queen.
NARRATOR: Pussy cat, pussy cat, what did you do there?
CAT: I frightened a little mouse under the chair.
- **Antiphonal Reading.** Divide your class into groups and assign key segments of the text to each group. As the class reads the text, different groups of students chime in to read their assigned parts.
- **Call and Response.** In call and response, one student reads a line of the text, and the class responds by repeating that line or reading the next few lines. (This works particularly well with song lyrics!)
- **Choral Singing.** This type of choral reading is particularly useful to beginning readers. After students have memorized the lyrics, you can begin to examine individual lines, words, and sounds to build phonological awareness. With enough practice, early readers will be able to read the words of the song without the support of the melody.⁷⁷

Echo Reading

Echo reading offers slightly less support for students than choral reading. The teacher reads a line or a phrase aloud, and the students echo it back, mimicking the intonation, phrasing and expression of the teacher's voice while following along with their eyes or a finger in the text. It's important for you to circulate around the classroom during echo reading to ensure that all of your students are actually reading and not just repeating the line or phrase you've read aloud.

Buddy Reading

In addition to this opportunity to practice oral reading with the teacher, students benefit when they do repeated reading with a buddy. In buddy reading, students of a similar reading level choose a text with which they are familiar and take turns reading orally. Some buddies might read alternate pages, while others echo or choral read pages.⁷⁸ Students should take turns reading aloud the passage three times and giving feedback on their partner's reading. Much like any practice you ask students to do with minimal supervision, you will need to model buddy reading and have students practice it many times with your guidance before they will be ready to do it on their own. To help students' structure the feedback they give to their partner, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 42: "Cooperative Repeated Reading Response Form") found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

⁷⁷ Adapted from Rasinski, Timothy V. *The Fluent Reader: Oral Reading Strategies for Building Word Recognition, Fluency and Comprehension*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2003, pp. 60-62.

⁷⁸ Rasinski, Timothy V. *The Fluent Reader: Oral Reading Strategies for Building Word Recognition, Fluency and Comprehension*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2003, pp. 68-69.

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Tape-Recorded Reading

Parents and teachers have long known the benefits of having students listen to books read aloud on tapes. To make this staple classroom activity even more powerful, teachers should be sure that the text is on the student's independent reading level, and that it is read aloud at a rate that will feel comfortable to the student as he or she attempts to read along. Model for your students how to listen and follow along with their fingers during the first reading, how to whisper read along with the tape the second and third time through, and how to try reading on their own, without the tape, for the final reading.

Though bookstores and libraries contain many books on tape, it's not necessary for the recording to be professional. In fact, the high reading rate and the background music or sound effects of professionally recorded books on tape can make it challenging for students to read along with. Using a tape recorder, you can easily record your own voice or the voice of other fluent readers reading aloud texts on a variety of levels. Perhaps you could ask members of your school and community to read a book on tape for your class. Imagine how excited your students would be to hear the principal or one of their parents reading a book on tape!

While repeated reading certainly has its instructional benefits, some students may find practicing the same text again and again less than exciting. One way to engage all of your students in repeated reading is by allowing students to read for an audience, a task that requires them to practice for a real performance. We'll look at two types of performance reading—**reader's theater** and **poetry readings**.

Reader's Theater

Reader's theater is a particularly effective way to engage students in repeated reading; it differs from plays or other dramatic productions because it does not require sets, costumes, or memorization of lines. For the audience to understand the meaning of the story, students must rely solely on their voices, which makes the repeated practice in anticipation of a performance all the more beneficial!

Reader's Theater: A Quick Guide⁷⁹

Before the Week Begins:

1. Select or write a script to be performed. Make two copies for each member of the repertory group.

Monday:

2. Introduce or review the nature, purpose, and procedures for reader's theater with the class.
3. Assign parts to individual students by having them volunteer or audition. Parts can also be assigned by students within groups and can rotate from one performance to another.

Tuesday-Thursday:

4. Have students practice their parts on their own, in their group, under your guidance, and at home.

Friday:

5. Invite students to perform their scripts for an audience, usually their classmates, but others can be invited as well: schoolmates, parents, the principal. Try to make the performance a special event. Many teachers turn Friday afternoons into a "classroom reader's theater festival" at which many repertory groups perform their scripts.

Many teachers divide their students into "repertory groups" of between six and nine students and allow the groups to have several days of "dress rehearsals" before they perform.⁸⁰ As they prepare for the performance, students may end up reading a script as many as twenty times. As evidence of how powerful reader's theater can be for students, consider the reflection of fourth grade teacher Jennifer Cecil (South Louisiana '03):

Iris has neurofibromatosis. She entered fourth grade reading on a beginning of first grade level and had missed a great deal of school because of treatments. She has a

⁷⁹ Ibid p.109.

⁸⁰ Ibid p. 106.

speech impediment and receives speech therapy. When we began using Reader's Theater in our class she was terrified. Another student made fun her speech at the beginning of the year, and it took her weeks to regain confidence in answering questions out loud. Now, I was asking her to read a part in a play in front of the whole class. Although her reading skills had improved hugely, she was worried that people wouldn't be able to understand her. So, at recess, I paired her up with a particularly tactful student to help her practice. At the first performance, she was clearly relieved that the audience had not laughed. At the second performance, her partner raised her hand during the audience comments section and said, "It was a lot easier to hear Iris this week. She did good." Last week was our sixth performance of reader's theater and Iris lobbied me for a bigger part. As the lead in "Keelboat Annie," Iris garnered many compliments about how she had used a "country accent" to play her part (and was still able to be understood). Students thought it was funny (on purpose) and said she really sounded angry when Annie should have been angry. She pushed herself at home practicing, I know, but the confidence that she has in herself now is tremendous. Her hard work in this one reading unit has doubtlessly increased her faith in herself and really ignited her interest in reading and performing.

Special education teachers who pull students out of their general education classes for small group instruction might consider cooperating with the classroom teacher to make reader's theater work. Ask the general educator for suggestions of books the class has read during Read Aloud or Guided Reading, and then use a section of those texts to write scripts for your students to perform. Have your students practice the scripts throughout the week and then perform them in their general education classrooms. Not only will reader's theater provide students with special reading needs the repeated reading practice necessary to increase their fluency, it will also increase their confidence, as they are able to perform as the "star" in front of their classmates. One special educator who used reader's theater with her students noted, "I have kids who read well come up to me and ask how they can get into my (pull-out) class!"⁸¹ For a list of ideas for reader's theater scripts, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 43: "Reader's Theater Script Sources") found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

Poetry Readings

To encourage students to read poems repeatedly, consider holding regular poetry readings at which individuals or groups can read a poem that they have practiced. The event itself can be as creative as you choose—some teachers have a stage and microphone, invite guests, and serve refreshments. Others center their poetry readings around a content theme, so students who are studying the Harlem Renaissance in social studies might perform poetry by Langston Hughes while the music of Duke Ellington plays in the background. Regardless of how you structure a poetry reading, it's crucial to give students multiple opportunities to practice their poems and offer feedback on their reading. For a list of great poetry books, see "Can't-Miss Poetry Books" in the online **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 44). ✖

Assess and Track Students' Fluency Over Time

To assess your students' fluency skills, periodically conduct the Timed Reading Exercise explained in chapter two and track students' word-per-minute growth. (You may want to refer to the chart at the beginning of this chapter for a reminder of targeted reading rate norms for grades one through five.) As with any academic skill, show a student her progress in that area and she will be more motivated to continue to work hard and improve. Zoë Stemm (Houston '00) taught first and second grade and involved her students in tracking their reading growth on a weekly basis. She explains:

⁸¹ Ibid.

Reading Fluency

I used the Neuhaus Fluency and Accuracy workshop materials (see www.neuhaus.org to order the packet) to find a paragraph of approximately 100 words for each of my students to use for their fluency practice for the week. On Monday during morning warm-up and independent reading, I had each student come back and read their new fluency passage to me for one minute and recorded the words per minute. Then every day that week during fluency practice my students would do one minute drills, reading aloud their passage and then counting up their words per minute to see if they had improved. After every drill students would record their WPM in their reading journal, and at the end of drills they would write down their WPM goal for the next day. Students also made flash cards for words that they had trouble with. Practicing for fluency with that passage was also part of my students' nightly homework. On Fridays during recess, I would listen to all of my students read their passage for one minute and record their WPM to see how they had improved over the course of the week. When we returned to the classroom, students would get out their "WPM graph" and graph their Friday WPM. If they had made improvement from the past Friday, they would turn in their graph and receive a new passage on Monday. If they didn't, they would keep working on the same passage the following week.

For guidance on how to determine a student's reading rate, see "How to Determine Passage Difficulty and Reading Rate" in the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 39-40), which can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. A sample "Chart for Tracking Students' Oral Reading Rate" is also included in the Toolkit (p. 41). ✕

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have looked at developing students' reading fluency in four broad ways:

- First, we considered how to **model fluent oral reading** during Read Aloud and Shared Reading.
- Then, we examined how to develop fluency through **phrasing lessons**, including Phrased Text Lessons and the repeated reading of high-frequency phrases and short sentences.
- Next, we took a look at a variety of methods that offer **many opportunities to practice with support**. Some of these included choral reading (and its many variations), echo reading, buddy reading, and using tape-recorded books.
- Finally, we considered the importance of **tracking students' fluency over time**.

In the next chapter, we'll narrow in on some concrete ways to improve students' reading comprehension through vocabulary learning and language development activities.

Methods of Comprehension Instruction I: Vocabulary and Language Development

Chapter Five

- I. Developing Oral Language Skills
- II. Specific Vocabulary Word Instruction
- III. Word Learning Instruction

For many years, educators, researchers, and parents have noticed a disheartening trend in reading performance on standardized tests. Between the third and fourth grades, the reading scores of low-income students sharply and suddenly decline. Reading researcher Jeanne Chall called this drop in test performance the “fourth grade slump.” Chall noted that while average low-income students in second and third grades score at or even slightly above the national average in reading, the test scores of that same group of students begin a decline in fourth grade that grows wider as they advance to higher grades.⁸² What could account for such a sudden, dramatic change in reading performance in the course of one school year?

Related Readings

Along with this chapter, please read the excerpt located in the Related Readings section at the end of this text:

- Put Reading First, pp. 39-51

To answer that question, consider the following. Fourth grade texts are more academic and increasingly complex; works of fiction are likely to include some advanced literary devices (such as symbolism and irony) while nonfiction texts often provide information about topics less familiar to students (such as world history and cultures, or fundamental science concepts). To understand much of their upper elementary school reading, students must be able to make inferences that require background knowledge in a given area. For example, readers who lack background knowledge of Greek mythology may find it difficult to understand why overcoming some challenges requires a “Herculean effort.” Clearly, readers of these more challenging books need to have large numbers of words in their vocabularies and an ever-growing understanding of the world around them. Without this “word and world knowledge,”⁸³ reading comprehension will be highly challenging.

Unfortunately, broad “word and world knowledge” is exactly what many of our students lack. As Hart and Risley’s research demonstrated, low-income and minority students tend to have oral language deficits that are the result of hearing far fewer words in their early childhoods than their wealthier peers.⁸⁴ It appears that the “fourth grade slump” does not represent a sudden change in students’ reading abilities. Rather, it is not until the fourth grade that standardized test data reveals the vocabulary deficits that have been present in many children since Kindergarten.

This vocabulary and knowledge gap only widens with time. First grade students from lower income groups know half as many words as first grade students from higher-income groups.⁸⁵ **By 12th grade, the lowest-**

⁸² Hirsch, E.D., Jr. “Reading Comprehension Requires Knowledge- of Words and the World: Scientific Insights into the Fourth-Grade Slump and the Nation’s Stagnant Comprehension Scores.” *American Educator*. American Federation of Teachers, Spring 2003.

⁸³ Expression attributed to Hirsch, E.D., Jr. “Reading Comprehension Requires Knowledge- of Words and the World: Scientific Insights into the Fourth-Grade Slump and the Nation’s Stagnant Comprehension Scores.” *American Educator*. American Federation of Teachers, Spring 2003.

⁸⁴ Hart, Betty and Todd Risley. *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing, 1995.

⁸⁵ Beck, Isabel et al. *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York: Guilford Press, 2002.

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performing students have vocabularies equal to the highest-performing third graders.⁸⁶ For most students, regardless of economic status, excellent instruction in the building blocks of literacy and in reading fluency is a prerequisite for comprehension but does not *ensure* that students will understand what they read. Reading comprehension is complex, but we know that it is comprised of at least two distinct parts: using vocabulary and background knowledge, and applying comprehension strategies and skills.

This chapter will examine how to teach students the first piece of the comprehension puzzle (chapter six will focus on teaching comprehension strategies and skills). Part I examines ways to develop the **oral language skills** of our students, paying particular attention to creating a language rich environment that encourages incidental vocabulary learning. In Part Two, we will consider how to build students' word knowledge through **specific vocabulary instruction**, and we will conclude by looking at the types of **word learning instruction** that are effective in teaching students to be independent word solvers.

Decoding						Comprehension			
Book and Print Awareness	Phonological and Phonemic Awareness	Phonics and The Alphabetic Principle	Word and Structural	Fluency			Background Knowledge	Vocabulary	Comprehension Strategies
				Sight Words	Automaticity	Phrasing			

I. Developing Oral Language Skills

Most words that are rooted firmly in a student's vocabulary are picked up incidentally over time, through immersion in a world rich with language.⁸⁷ To encourage students' oral language development, teachers must create that language-rich world within their classrooms. To do this, they:

1. Use mature vocabulary repeatedly and in multiple contexts.
2. Encourage students to speak in complete sentences and incorporate learned vocabulary into their comments and questions.
3. Provide opportunities for students to engage with others in conversation—about familiar personal or shared experiences, problems in the classroom, the community and world, books and articles, etc.

Teachers whose classrooms are ideal communities for incidental word learning are aware of the importance of their own word and language choices. They use words again and again that stretch the limits of students' current vocabularies. Vocabulary experts Isabel Beck, Margaret McKeown, and Linda Kucan describe many opportunities to use sophisticated vocabulary in everyday classroom conversations:

- When children talk about others "copying them," the teacher offers *imitate*.
- When the children complete good work, the teacher calls it *exceptional*.
- When the teacher announces that an individual who had a particular skill would be visiting, he is called an *expert*.
- When the class is behaving well, she calls them *mature*.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Hirsch, E.D., Jr. "Reading Comprehension Requires Knowledge- of Words and the World: Scientific Insights into the Fourth-Grade Slump and the Nation's Stagnant Comprehension Scores." *American Educator*. American Federation of Teachers, Spring 2003.

- When the weather forecast predicts rain on a field trip day, the teacher calls the news *discouraging*.
- A student who keeps asking, “When are you going to give us our tests back?” is called *relentless*.
- A student who plans ahead for completing her homework for the week is called *pragmatic*.
- A student who works and works at writing his name clearly is called *persistent*.⁸⁸

Though it’s necessary for students to hear sophisticated words in the classroom, teacher modeling does not sufficiently prepare students to add those words to their own vocabularies. Students must hear words in multiple contexts and have many opportunities to engage in conversations with others.

In Kindergarten through second grades, the teacher may set aside a few minutes of the day for students to engage in conversation about personal experiences, school problems or community events so that they can practice speaking in complete sentences and so that the teacher can add unfamiliar words to students’ vocabularies. For example, first graders might turn to their partner and talk about their favorite foods, after which the teacher asks one pair to share their response in a complete sentence. Then, the whole class repeats the sentences about favorite foods together, counting the number of words in the sentence and making sure it is complete. The daily oral language exercise is complete when the teacher, acting as scribe, records the students’ thoughts on paper and leads them to read aloud the message that they have all worked to create.

While the above example might allow children an opportunity to engage in conversation with others, it will do little to build vocabulary, as students will use only words they already know to share thoughts and ideas with their classmates. To increase the challenge of this language activity, Kindergarten and first grade teachers can use “concept sorts” to give students practice thinking about the meaning of new words. Donald Bear and colleagues describe this method and its usefulness for young students:

In concept sorts, students take collections of objects or pictures and group them according to like attributes. We may sort as a whole class, such as when we sort shoes by various features; we may sort with a small group of students; or we may guide students as they sort individually or with partners in parallel fashion. As the process of sorting is introduced, we demonstrate and describe the reason we are categorizing the objects as we go (Nielson-Dunn, 2002). We begin by sorting dualistically—those that belong to a category and those that do not. For instance, in a food picture sort, we may classify pictures into those items that students have eaten and those that they have not. Later these same pictures may be sorted into the more complex categories of vegetables, meats, breads, and so forth.

Concept sorts provide the content to which students can attach new oral vocabulary. A previously unknown food such as *asparagus* can be learned in a concept sort where there is meaningful context with visual support. We advance students’ vocabularies and verbal reasoning by talking about the way they sort.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Beck, Isabel et al. *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York: Guilford Press, 2002.

⁸⁹ Bear, D.R. & Lori Helman, “Word Study for Vocabulary Development in the Early Stages of Literacy Learning,” in *Vocabulary Instruction: Research to Practice*, edited by James F. Baumann and Edward J. Kame’enui, New York: Guilford Press, 2004, p. 146.

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A concept sort allows students to begin with what they know—foods that they have eaten, (like *pizza*, *chicken*, or *green beans*), and continue on to explore what they don't know—foods that may be completely outside of their own experiences (such as *asparagus*, *artichokes*, or *mangoes*). In this way, any conversation about everyday activities can become a chance to enrich young students' vocabulary. Classroom chatter about students' moods might lead students to use words like *happy*, *sad*, or *excited*; by adding a concept sort for words that describe emotions, you can teach students advanced vocabulary to describe how they're feeling, such as *joyful*, *melancholy*, or *ecstatic*.

Daily oral language activities should increase the number of words that students can use as they talk about personal or shared experiences, classroom or world problems, or academic content that they are learning. Additionally, **challenging language instruction must extend to books during Read Aloud or Shared Reading, as they are perhaps our best source for rich words to discuss and use with our students.** Isabel Beck and colleagues describe a story that contains a collection of words for students to examine:

For example, while reading *Catherine, Called Birdy*, historical fiction set in the Middle Ages by Karen Cushman (1994), students can suggest words to put on a bulletin board or poster with pictures or explanations. From the first chapter, students might suggest *abbey*, *monk*, *vespers*, *crusades*, *solar*, *privy*, *shire*, *minstrel*, and *knight*. After the words have been posted, they can be sorted into categories, such as church words, rooms and places, and people. The display can be referred to as the novel is read, and more words can be added.⁹⁰

We know that given the right classroom environment, students can add words to their vocabularies each day, simply by hearing and thinking about a wide variety of words. By using sophisticated language on a regular basis, encouraging students to engage in conversations with others, and providing multiple opportunities for students to think about and work with word meanings, you will be able to create a classroom in which the following exchange, overhead in a first grade classroom, is commonplace:

Jason: Is this going to be an ordinary day?

Ms. H: What would make it ordinary?

Jason: If we like did the same old thing.

Ms. H: What might make it not ordinary, make it exceptional?

Jason: If you gave us prizes for being good—I mean exceptional and mature.⁹¹

II. Specific Vocabulary Word Instruction

Researchers have found that students with limited vocabularies experience less success than peers with more advanced vocabularies in learning words incidentally (through immersion or exposure). Psychologist Keith Stanovich calls this the "Matthew effect," the idea that in reading development, the rich get rich and the poor get poorer. In other words, students with weak decoding and fluency skills read less and therefore have much less exposure to vocabulary. This reality is one explanation for why we

⁹⁰ Beck, Isabel et al. *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York: Guilford Press, 2002, p. 124.

⁹¹ Ibid p. 47.

must teach directly some of the unfamiliar words that our students will undoubtedly encounter while reading. However, not all teachers recognize how challenging it is to explicitly teach vocabulary. Unfortunately, perhaps the most obvious (if not most common) approaches to vocabulary instruction are also the least effective.

Many of us remember having to look words up in the dictionary and memorize their meanings, or being presented with a list of ten or more unrelated words to learn each week. These familiar approaches to teaching new words are all but useless as instructional methods, as researchers attest:

The most frequently used inappropriate technique is that of giving students a list of words out of context and telling them to look up their meanings in the dictionary. Three facts argue against this. First, most words have several meanings and many shades of meaning. Taken out of context, there is no way for students to decide which dictionary definition is most nearly appropriate. Second, unless a learner has some knowledge of a word and its meaning already, dictionary definitions are often inadequate...Finally, asking students to do something does not constitute instruction.⁹²

So, what are we to do? Researchers generally agree that students can learn some new words (perhaps 3 – 15 new words out of 100 unfamiliar words) by reading them and determining their meaning from context.⁹³ This slow progress in learning words in context is most likely due to the fact that discerning the meaning of a word by using the oft-espoused “context clues” is surprisingly challenging, especially for beginning and struggling readers. Using context clues demands the ability to make connections to background knowledge and make inferences within the passage, often beyond the surrounding few sentences. Next time you come across an unfamiliar word in a text, try to track the cognitive circumvolutions⁹⁴ you use to determine the meaning from the context clues. It isn’t always easy. And for beginning and struggling readers, it’s often an impossible task.

As opposed to relying *solely* on students learning new vocabulary words incidentally from hearing sophisticated language spoken in the classroom and using context clues during independent reading, researchers promote systematic and explicit vocabulary instruction, especially for struggling readers and students with weak vocabularies. When engaging in this explicit vocabulary instruction, the most effective approaches require that the teacher:

- (1) Carefully choose a limited number of words and provide direct, student-friendly explanations of their meanings.
- (2) Create meaningful interactions with the words in a variety of formats and contexts.
- (3) Ensure that students have multiple exposures to the new words.

Let’s look at each of these three points in turn to see how we can help students learn, use, and remember the vocabulary words we teach them.

⁹² Ryder, Randall and Michael Graves. *Reading and Learning in the Content Areas, 2nd edition*. Wiley Text Books, 2002.

⁹³ Baumann, James F. and Edward J. Kame’enui, ed. *Vocabulary Instruction: Research to Practice*. New York: Guilford Press, 2004, p. 15

⁹⁴ If you didn’t automatically know the meaning of circumvolution, you probably first thought about the context in which it was used: to describe the challenging mental steps people go through to determine a word’s meaning. Then, you looked at the prefix, *circum*, and knew that meant “around.” *Volution* might have posed more of a problem, but you know other words with that root, such as “revolution” and so probably deduced that it had to do with turning. You pretty much got it: Circumvolution, *noun*. The act of turning, winding or folding around a central axis.

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1. Carefully choose a limited number of words and provide student-friendly explanations of their meanings.

If you preview a Read Aloud story or an informational article to be used in Shared Reading and identify all the words that you anticipate students not knowing, you will probably come up with a lengthy, overwhelming list. As teachers, we need to know how to narrow our focus for the number of words we teach our students. How do we do that? First, consider how researchers Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown have grouped an individual's vocabulary into three tiers:⁹⁵

Tier one: the most basic words, such as *water, picture, girl, money* that rarely require explicit instruction in school, as their meanings are acquired through day-to-day conversation.

Tier two: words that occur in the vocabulary of "mature language users" and are used in a variety of written and oral communication, such as *compromise, absurd, diligent, and typical*.

Tier three: words that are mostly unique to a particular content area, such as *watershed, rhombus, amnesty, and peninsula*.

As a general rule of thumb, during the balanced literacy block, we should focus on tier two words, perhaps the most critical for our students to master in order to have a broadly applicable vocabulary and enhanced reading and writing ability. During math, science, or social studies instruction, we will need to teach content-specific tier three words.

When choosing tier two words to explicitly teach and reinforce with students, consider the following questions⁹⁶:

- Which words are *important* and have *high utility*, appearing frequently across a variety of domains?
- Which words have *instructional potential* and can be worked with in many different ways so that students can understand their meanings and connect them to other words and concepts?
- Which words will students be able to *understand conceptually*?

Now we know what we mean by *carefully* choosing the vocabulary words we teach. What do we mean by a *limited number*? Researchers generally agree that students can learn three new words a day, at most. Consider the first paragraph of an old tale about a donkey who is under a spell and must do work for some lazy servants (appropriate for use with third or fourth graders). Try to identify all potential tier two words that you might teach:

Johnny Harrington was a kind master who treated his servants fairly. He was also a successful wool merchant, and his business required that he travel often. In his absence, his servants would tend to the fields and cattle and maintain the upkeep of his mansion. They performed their duties happily, for they felt fortunate to have such a benevolent and trusting master.⁹⁷

Did you choose *merchant, required, tend, maintain, performed, fortunate, and benevolent*? Though there is no science that dictates exactly how to choose vocabulary words, these seven words are all in the oral

⁹⁵ Baumann, James F. and Edward J. Kame'enui, ed. *Vocabulary Instruction: Research to Practice*. New York: Guilford Press, 2004, p. 14.

⁹⁶ Beck, Isabel et al. *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York: Guilford Press, 2002, p. 19.

⁹⁷ Ibid p. 16.

vocabularies of mature language users. Given that this paragraph has many tier two words, it's necessary to consider which will be most helpful for students to know in order to understand the rest of the story. Which would you choose to teach directly to your students?⁹⁸

After you have chosen a few tier two words to teach your students, consider how you will introduce and explain them. As you try to create student-friendly definitions, keep in mind two basic steps. First, characterize the word and explain how it is used, and then explain the meaning of the word in simple, everyday language.¹⁰⁰ When you characterize a word, you are trying to make its meaning specific. Think about how you use the word *most* often and avoid overloading your students with all of its multiple meanings. To facilitate student understanding, define new words by using everyday, student-friendly language.

Some Student-Friendly Definitions⁹⁹

- **Exhausted** means feeling so tired that you can hardly move.
- **Strange** describes something different from what you are used to seeing or hearing.
- **Covert** describes something that is done in a secret or hidden way.
- **Improvise** means to make something you need by using whatever is available at the moment.

2. Create meaningful interactions with the words.

Providing student-friendly definitions of a few targeted vocabulary words is a solid first step in helping students to acquire new words. The next stage of instruction involves creating meaningful ways for students to interact with new words. Here we will focus on a handful of strategies that will support students in learning new words, each of which can be used at any grade level.

It is critical to provide students with many examples of a word's use **beyond the context of the story** in which it was read. Beck and colleagues admit that creating examples is a difficult task; they recommend thinking about places young children are familiar with (school, playground, street, store), things they like to do (play, eat, go to school, sleep), and things they are interested in (animals, toys, games, nature).¹⁰¹ Consider the following examples for the words defined in the box above:

- For **exhausted**: how someone would probably feel if they had been running away from a mean dog; how someone might feel if they had played basketball for a long, long time.
- For **strange**: a baby driving a car; a grandma going down a water slide.
- For **covert**: how you write in a diary that you keep locked and hidden under your bed; how you plan a surprise party for your dad.
- For **improvise**: what you do when it's raining and you forgot your umbrella so you use your backpack to keep your head dry; what your mom does when she runs out of chocolate chips while baking cookies and uses the raisins she has in the refrigerator.

Once you've provided examples that show how to use the targeted words beyond the story, it's time to involve your students in meaningful activities that help them to internalize new vocabulary words. The following menu of activities and accompanying questions will challenge your students to think about a word's meaning to complete the task:

⁹⁸ Beck and colleagues suggest *fortunate*, *benevolent*, and *merchant*. The first two words help to set up the conditions of the story, while the third is a vocabulary word often found in upper elementary social studies textbooks.

⁹⁹ Beck, Isabel et al. *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York: Guilford Press, 2002, pp. 38-39.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid p. 35.

¹⁰¹ Beck, Isabel et al. "Taking Delight in Words: Using Oral Language to Build Young Children's Vocabularies." *American Educator*. American Federation of Teachers, Spring 2003.

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Give Questions, Reasons, and Examples

- If you are walking around a dark room, you need to do it *cautiously*. Why? What are some other things that need to be done cautiously?
- What is something you could do to *impress* your teacher? Why? What is something you could do that might *impress* your mother?
- Which of these things might be *extraordinary*? Why or why not?
 - A shirt that was comfortable, or a shirt that washed itself?
 - A flower that kept blooming all year, or a flower that bloomed for three days?
 - A person who has a library card, or a person who has read all the books in the library?

Prompt Students to Make Choices

- If any of the things I say might be examples of people *clutching* something, say, “clutching.” If not, don’t say anything.
 - Holding on tightly to a purse
 - Holding a fistful of money
 - Softly petting a cat’s fur
 - Holding on to branches while climbing a tree
 - Blowing bubbles and trying to catch them
- If any of the things I say would make someone look *radiant*, say, “You’d be radiant.” If not, don’t say anything.
 - Winning a million dollars
 - Getting a hug from a favorite movie star
 - Walking to the post office
 - Cleaning your room
 - Having the picture you painted hung up in the school library

Ask Students to Relate Words

- If you get your clothes ready to wear to school before you go to bed, would that be *sensible* or *raucous*?
- If you and your friends were watching a funny TV show together and began to laugh a lot, would you sound *pounce* or *raucous*?

Offer One Context for All the Words

- What would an *immense* plate of spaghetti look like?
- Why might you feel *miserable* after eating all that spaghetti?
- What would it look like to eat spaghetti in a *leisurely* way?

To Encourage Children Create Examples

- If there were an *emergency* at an amusement park, what might have happened?
- If you had a friend who watched TV all the time, how might you *coax* him into getting some exercise?¹⁰²

¹⁰² Ibid.

Sample Instructional Sequence

As an example of how you might structure a vocabulary lesson, read the following lesson sequence for three target words (*reluctant*, *insisted*, and *drowsy*) from *A Pocket for Corduroy*.

In the story, Lisa was *reluctant* to leave the Laundromat without Corduroy. *Reluctant* means you are not sure you want to do something. Say the word with me. Someone might be reluctant to eat a food that he or she never had before, or someone might be reluctant to ride a roller coaster because it looks scary.

Tell me about something you would be reluctant to do. Try to use *reluctant* when you tell about it. You could start by saying something like, "I would be reluctant to..." What's the word we've been talking about?¹⁰³

After the teacher defined the word and gave examples of the word beyond the context of the story, the students offered what they'd be reluctant to do.

Child 1: I would be reluctant to leave my teddy bear in the Laundromat.

Teacher: Well, that's just like what Lisa did in the story. Try to think about something you might be reluctant to do that is not like Lisa.

Child 2: I would be reluctant to leave my teddy bear in the supermarket.

Teacher: Okay, that's a little different than what Lisa was reluctant to do, but try to think of something that you would be reluctant to do that is very different than what Lisa was reluctant to do.

Child 3: I would be reluctant to leave my drums at my friend's house.

Teacher: That's pretty different from what Lisa was reluctant to do, but can we think of something that you would be reluctant to do that isn't about leaving something somewhere?

Child 3: I would be reluctant to change a baby's diaper!¹⁰⁴

Notice that even though the teacher presented the word in two different contexts (being reluctant to eat something, being reluctant to ride something), the students all returned to the original story context (being reluctant to leave something behind). The teacher continued to encourage the students to use the word in a completely different way than how it was used in the text, and eventually, one student provided a totally original use of the word! Take a look at how the teacher completes this lesson, involving students in working with each word separately, and then all three target words together.

In the story, Lisa's mother *insisted* that she leave the Laundromat when it was closing. *Insisted* means to say that something **MUST** be done—you won't take no for an answer. Let's say the word aloud.

Your mother might insist that you wear mittens when it is cold outside. She doesn't just TELL you to wear them, she makes sure you have them on before you go out!

¹⁰³ Beck, Isabel et al. *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York: Guilford Press, 2002, p. 51.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid* p. 52.

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If you were in charge of helping your class get ready to go on a trip, think of something you would insist that everybody do. Try to use the new word when you tell us. You could start by saying, "I would insist that..." What's the word we're learning?

In the story, Corduroy felt drowsy when he landed in the laundry basket after his adventures in the Laundromat. *Drowsy* means feeling as though you are going to fall asleep. Let's all say our word together.

Sometimes riding in the car makes people feel drowsy, as though they want to take a nap. What might make you feel drowsy, loud drums playing or soft music? Why? When might you feel drowsy? In the middle of your favorite TV program or after swimming on a hot day? Why?

We talked about three words: *insisted*, *reluctant*, *drowsy*. Let's think about them.

Show us how your mother might look if she insisted you go to bed. Show us how you would look if you felt reluctant about taking your little sister to the park. Show us how you would look if you sat down in a comfortable chair and started to feel drowsy.¹⁰⁵

Though the instructional example above asks children to interact with new words through whole class discussion, you might ask students to think and share with a partner before soliciting suggestions from volunteers. In their first interaction with new words, all students will likely need the support and guidance of the teacher to clarify meaning and ensure that words are being used in a variety of contexts. Later practice with these words can happen in small groups, pairs, or individually and can involve writing (particularly for third through fifth graders), drawing, or acting to demonstrate understanding of the word and the ability to convey its meaning.

Using **graphic organizers** is another effective way to involve students in thinking about words and their attributes. One such organizer is a **semantic map**; it can be used with all grade levels to help students classify tier two words found in a class novel or tier three content-area words from a science textbook, for example. Effective instruction using a semantic map has four parts.¹⁰⁶

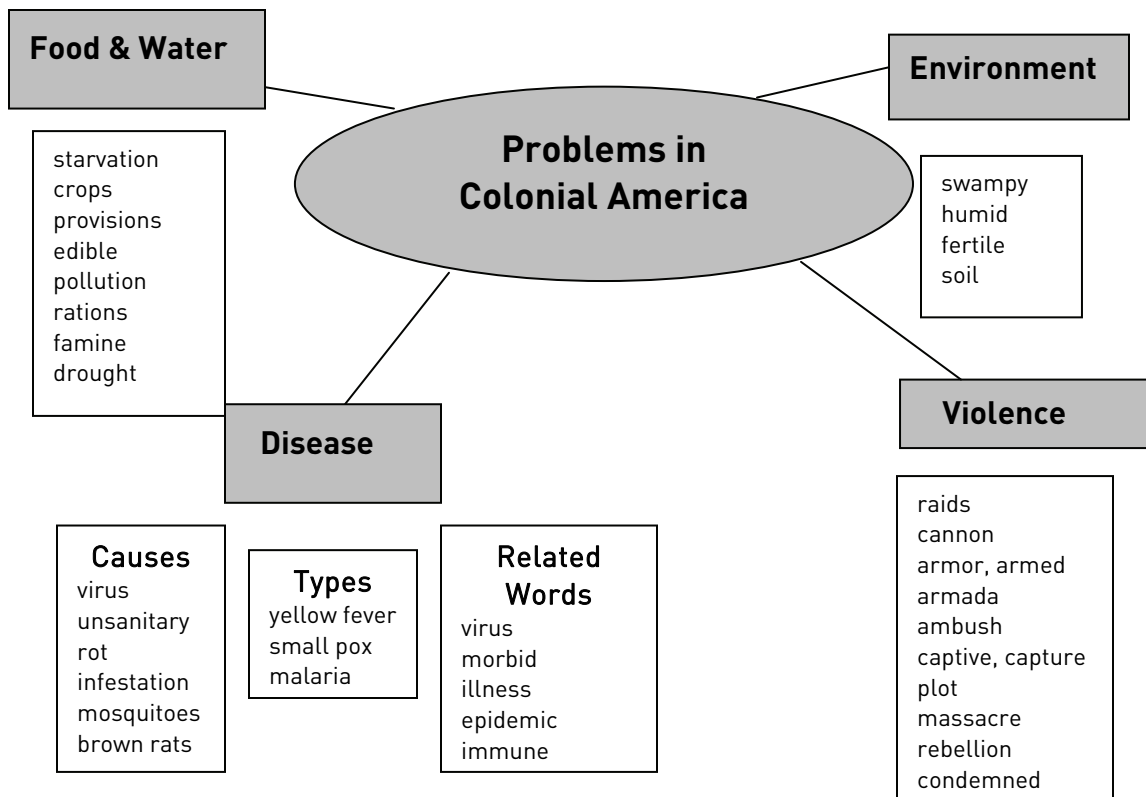
- (1) Brainstorming.** The teacher and class brainstorm ideas having to do with a particular theme. For example, a fourth grade class immersed in a social studies unit on Colonial America might brainstorm ideas related to problems in the colonies. Students might suggest *attacks*, *little food to eat*, *sickness*, *mosquitoes*, *famine*, *small pox*, and many other relevant words and ideas. The teacher explains less familiar words (*famine*, *small pox*) and contributes additional ideas to the list.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid pp. 53-54.

¹⁰⁶ Baumann, James F. and Edward J. Kame'enui, ed. *Vocabulary Instruction: Research to Practice*. New York: Guilford Press, 2004.

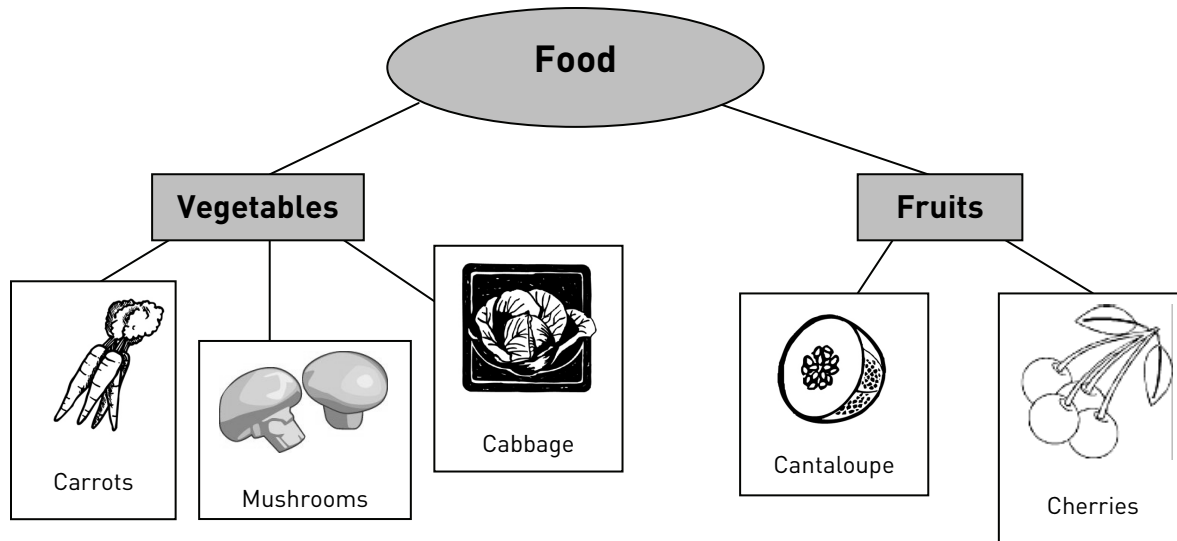
- (2) Mapping.** The teacher guides the students to examine the list of ideas and create three or four categories in which to classify the words. In our Colonial America example, students group the words into three categories of *problems*, *disease*, *violence*, and *food and water*. The teacher and/or students draw a map to represent the categories and subset ideas. For beginning readers, labeled pictures can be used.
- (3) Reading.** After drawing the map, the class reads a selection about the theme. Depending on the reading abilities of the students, the selection might be read aloud, read chorally as a whole class, or read in partners. The fourth grade teacher gives each of her students a copy of *You Wouldn't Want to Be an American Colonist! A Settlement You'd Rather Not Start* by Jacqueline Morley, and guides them to use the table of contents to locate sections that might provide information on colonial problems. The students read several sections of the informational text with a partner.
- (4) Completing the map.** After reading the text, the teacher and students discuss new ideas they have learned and return to examine the map. Often, students will add a category to the map, as well as many ideas to the categories. After reading about colonial problems, the fourth graders decide that they need to add a category that can include problems colonists faced because of the land and water. The teacher provides the students with the word *environment* and students add it to their map. The teacher guides students to look back to specific sections of the text to find words and ideas that might be added to each category. To complete the lesson, partners share the ideas they found and the class adds them to the map.

Consider the following semantic map produced by our fourth grade social studies class:



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A semantic map that builds the vocabulary of beginning readers or English Language Learners can use labeled pictures to represent ideas:



By structuring students' interactions so that they have to think about the meaning of the word in order to complete a task, you can ensure that the vocabulary you have introduced will be used and remembered by your students.

3. Ensure students have multiple exposures to the new words.

After you and your students have finished reading a book or completed a science or social studies unit, what happens to all of the new words your students learned? If they disappear from your classroom forever, your students will have a difficult time remembering and using them, no matter how many times they interacted with those words during the unit. Vocabulary research indicates that students need to have frequent, ongoing encounters with words if they are to become a part of students' permanent vocabularies.

One obvious way to ensure that learned words don't disappear is to continue to use them in your own language and to praise your students who do the same. The following are ways that you can continually reinforce learned vocabulary words with your students:

- (1) "Favorite Words" Bulletin Boards.** Create a "Favorite Words" bulletin board in your classroom. After you've read a book, copy its cover and post the related words and student-friendly definitions underneath. Involve students in adding words (and example sentences) to the board, as doing so will require them to continue to grapple with the meaning of learned words.
- (2) Content/Concept Charts.** Similarly, create a chart that displays the words students have learned in social studies, science, or mathematics units. Whether it's a social studies chart with words learned in the Colonial America unit, a science chart showing weather-related concepts, or a math chart listing geometry-related words, it's helpful to include some visual representations of newly learned ideas. After the unit is complete, you can group charts together according to content area and allow students to reference them throughout the year.

We work on vocabulary by drawing pictures of words, acting out words in short skits, and playing vocabulary bingo. Our literacy program has unit vocabulary that I use. I also select tier II and III words from other texts that we are reading. I give my students weekly vocabulary tests so I can track their progress.

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(3) Apply Learned Words to New Stories. Children will probably recognize when a word they've learned through a previous story appears in a new one. Challenge them further by asking them to apply a learned word to a new story. For example, during the Read Aloud a teacher might ask students to relate words they've already learned to *Curious George Goes to a Chocolate Factory* by asking the following questions:

- We learned some words in other stories that could fit here, too. How about the word *craving*? How does that describe something that happened in this story?¹⁰⁷
- Remember the word *deserve*? George got a box of chocolates as a present at the end. Do you think he deserved to get that? Why?¹⁰⁸
- Does anybody remember a word that George might use to talk about the candy? It's a word we used to talk about the things the wolf baked for the chickens in *The Wolf's Chicken Stew*. George thought the candy was... [*scrumptious*].¹⁰⁹

(4) Use Learned Words in Reading and Writing. By including learned words in daily reading and writing activities, you'll ensure that students have opportunities to hear and use new vocabulary again and again. Consider the following suggestions:

- Incorporate the words in the **morning message**. For example, you might write, "Today is Tuesday. It is a *lovely* day outside. The sun is *radiant* and the temperature is *balmy*. I *insist* that we work hard this morning so that we can go outside and play at recess."¹¹⁰
- Create a **class dictionary** that includes meanings and example sentences for all the vocabulary words you've learned.¹¹¹
- Include work with learned vocabulary words at **literacy centers**. As an example, you could make a board game that requires students to interact with the meanings of different words.
- Encourage students to **use learned words in their own writing**. If a student writing a personal narrative about a trip to the amusement park describes a ride as scary, challenge him to use a word he's learned instead (such as *menacing* or *intimidating*).¹¹²
- Play **games with vocabulary** during transition times or when you have a free moment. For example, write words on a piece of paper and place them in a "Magic Word Hat." Before lining up for lunch or recess, ask a student to choose a slip, read the word, and call on a classmate to use that word in a sentence.¹¹³

Providing specific word instruction that expands students' vocabularies is a difficult but critical task. By providing student-friendly definitions for a few, carefully chosen words, creating meaningful ways for students to interact with their meanings, and ensuring that students have multiple exposures to the words, you will guide your students to increase their vocabularies significantly and thus, improve their reading comprehension.

¹⁰⁷ Beck, Isabel et al. *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York: Guilford Press, 2002, p. 70.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid* pp. 70-71.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid* p. 70.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹¹² *Ibid*.

¹¹³ *Ibid*.

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III. Word Learning Instruction

Thus far, we have examined how to create a language-rich classroom environment and how to provide direct instruction in specific vocabulary words. In this section, we will focus on a final, crucial aspect of vocabulary development: word learning instruction. When teachers offer word learning instruction, they give students tools that will aid their ability to determine a word's meaning on their own. We'll examine three such tools for solving words, including:

- I. Using the dictionary
- II. Using meaningful word parts (morphemes)
- III. Using context clues

Using the Dictionary

Though dictionary definitions can be unhelpful to children (and sometimes adults) who seek to understand a word's meaning, it is important that our students know how to access this resource. To use the dictionary effectively, students must know and be able to use the following prerequisite information and skills:

- (1) How to put a list of words in alphabetical order
- (2) Organizational features of the dictionary, including the sequencing of words according to alphabetical order and the use of guide words to help readers locate words quickly
- (3) Organizational features of an entry, including pronunciation, part of speech, and all possible meanings of the word
- (4) How to use organizational features of the book and its entries to locate a word entry and determine its meaning, part of speech, or correct pronunciation

As this tool will probably be the least helpful for your students in determining word meaning, it's best not to spend excessive time developing dictionary skills. If your school has a librarian, you might attempt to coordinate instruction so that students can spend part of their library time learning and practicing dictionary skills.

Using Meaningful Word Parts

Perhaps the most powerful type of word learning instruction that we can offer our students is an in-depth study of *morphemes*, the smallest meaningful units in the English language (including whole words, prefixes, suffixes, or roots). These meaningful units are classified by type: *free morphemes* stand alone as a meaningful word (such as *man*, *blue*, *she*, and *under*) while *bound morphemes* (roots, prefixes, and suffixes) work as meaningful units only when combined with other morphemes (such as *revise*, *telephone*, *underline*, and *unknown*). Mounting research indicates that attention to morphemes supports students' vocabulary growth.¹¹⁴ If you consider that knowing only 20 prefixes allows us to determine the meaning of nearly 3,000 words, the importance of morphology becomes clear.¹¹⁵

Our first task is to determine which morphemes to teach to our students and in what order to teach them. Literacy expert Louisa Cook Moats recommends beginning instruction in morpheme analysis in the first grade and continuing through high school.¹¹⁶ Some districts mandate a specific sequence of instruction in morphemes, aligned with state standards and standardized tests. If your district does so, you should

¹¹⁴ Baumann, James F. and Edward J. Kame'enui, ed. *Vocabulary Instruction: Research to Practice*. New York: Guilford Press, 2004, p. 120.

¹¹⁵ Ibid p. 87.

¹¹⁶ Moats, Louisa Cook. *Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2000, p. 74.

follow the provided scope and sequence. Researchers, many of whom advise states as they create grade-level standards, recommend a logical instructional sequence that teaches the most common and transparent morphemes first, and moves to more complex morphemes later.

Specifically, you should teach first through third graders compound words (combinations of two free morphemes, such as *earring* and *homemade*), inflected suffixes (grammatical endings such as *-ing*, *-er*, *-y*, *-s*, and *-ed*), and the most common prefixes (*re-* and *un-*).¹¹⁷ In third through fifth grades, teach students to recognize and know the meanings of many prefixes and suffixes. Fourth and fifth grade teachers add instruction of Greek and Latin roots, as well as the process for breaking a word into its component parts to derive its meaning.¹¹⁸

In addition to the general grade-level sequence provided above, we know that it makes sense to teach first the morphemes that students will encounter most often in their reading (just as we do when we teach letter-sound relationships). To provide you with even more guidance, consider the following tables; both provide an overview of the twenty most common prefixes and suffixes and their meanings:¹¹⁹

The Twenty Most Frequent Prefixes			
Prefix	Words with the Prefix	Prefix	Words with the Prefix
un- (not, opposite of)	782	pre- (before)	79
re- (again)	401	inter- (between, among)	77
in-, im-, ir-, il- (not)	313	fore- (before)	76
dis- (not, opposite of)	216	de- (opposite of)	71
en-, em- (cause to)	132	trans- (across)	47
non- (not)	126	super- (above)	43
in-, im- (in or into)	105	semi- (half)	39
over- (too much)	98	anti- (against)	33
mis- (wrongly)	83	mid- (middle)	33
sub- (under)	80	under- (too little)	25

The Twenty Most Frequent Suffixes			
Suffix	Words with the Suffix	Suffix	Words with the Suffix
-s, -es (plurals)	31%	-ity, -ty (state of)	1%
-ed (past-tense verbs)	20%	-ment (action or process)	1%
-ing (verb form/present participle)	14%	-ic (having characteristics of)	1%
-ly (characteristic of)	7%	-ous, -eous, -ious (possessing the qualities of)	1%
-er, -or (person connected with)	4%	-en (made of)	1%
-ion, -tion, -ation, -ition (act, process)	4%	-er (comparative)	1%
-ible, -able (can be done)	2%	-ive, -ative, -itive (adjective form of a noun)	1%
-al, -ial (having characteristics of)	1%	-ful (full of)	1%
-y (characterized by)	1%	-less (without)	1%
-ness (state of, condition of)	1%	-est (comparative)	1%

¹¹⁷ Ibid pp. 74-76.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Modified from Beers, Kylene. *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003.

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The following list of common Greek and Latin roots, meanings, and example words will be helpful as you plan instruction for your fourth and fifth graders:

Common Greek Roots		
Root	Meaning	Example
graph	writing	autograph
meter	measuring	centimeter
micro	small	microphone
logy	study of	biology
photo/phos	light	photograph
scope	instrument for viewing	telescope
tele	far, distant	telephone
thermo	heat	thermostat
Common Latin Roots		
Root	Meaning	Example
aud	to hear	audible
dict	to speak	dictate
port	to carry	transport, portable
rupt	to break	rupture, interrupt
scrib/script	to write	describe, prescription
spect	to look at	spectacles, perspective
struct	to build	construct, structure
trac/tract	to drag or pull	tractor, subtract
vis	to see	visible, supervise

Now that we have guidance on when to teach our students particular morphemes, let's take a look at how to help our students understand what these units of language mean and figure out a word's meaning by examining its parts. Researchers advise teachers to follow these four guidelines as we teach morphemic analysis:

- (1) Provide explicit instruction in how morphemic analysis works.**
- (2) Examine relationships between words through "word families."**
- (3) Provide structure so that students can use morphemic analysis independently.**
- (4) Be clear with students that morphemic analysis does not always work.**¹²⁰

We'll take a more in-depth look at each of these recommendations to understand better how they guide classroom instruction.

(1) Provide explicit instruction in how morphemic analysis works. Be clear with your students that morphemic analysis involves breaking a word into meaningful parts, knowing the meanings of those parts, and putting them back together again to determine the word's meaning. Explain to your students why it is important that they learn to do this—share that they will be able to read and understand many, many words if they can use this process.

¹²⁰ Baumann, James F. and Edward J. Kame'enui, ed. *Vocabulary Instruction: Research to Practice*. New York: Guilford Press, 2004, p. 164-166.

After students understand why you are teaching them the meanings of small parts of words, you should identify, pronounce, and define the morpheme that you are teaching.¹²¹ Students find it helpful to have a formal definition of the morpheme that they are learning, such as, “A *micrometer* is an instrument that lets us measure in small units.”¹²² In this way, students will have a model by which to determine a definition of a word that they are examining independently. When they approach *telescope* in their science textbook, they will be able to craft a similar definition: “A *telescope* is an instrument that lets us see things that are far away.”

What does an explicit definition of a morpheme sound like?

A second grade teacher might explain compound words by saying, “When we take one word that means something on its own, like *dog*, and combine it with another word that means something on its own, like *house*, we make a new, compound word: *doghouse*.”

A fourth grade teacher might explain prefixes by saying, “A prefix is a word part that is placed before a base or root word and changes the word’s meaning. For example, if we add the prefix *re-* to the base word *read* we have changed the base word’s meaning. When we *reread* we read something again, because the prefix *re-* means again.”

(2) Examine relationships between words through “word families.” It’s important to make students aware that many words are connected because they share a word part. Many related words are pronounced in significantly different ways (*preside* and *president*, for example), so students may have difficulty hearing that they share a common word part. For this reason, and so that they can improve their spelling, students need to see these words grouped together as “word families.”

Even when introducing morphemes, it is helpful to begin to build students’ understanding of the network of words that they can read and understand by knowing one word part. Consider the following snapshot of a fifth grade classroom in which the teacher is teaching his students how Latin word roots work within words:

“In thousands of words, there is a word part that is like a base word in that prefixes and suffixes attach to it. Unlike base words, however, this word part usually cannot stand by itself as a word. Still, it is the most important part of the word in which it occurs. We call it a *word root*. Let me show you one that’s in a couple of words you know quite well.”

Mr. Ramirez then writes *fracture* and *fraction* on the board: “We know what these two words are and what they mean. What happens when you *fracture* your arm? [You break it.] What do you do when you divide something into *fractions*? [Mr. Ramirez elicits from the students that you break whole numbers down into fractions.] Good! Now, both of the words *fracture* and *fraction* have the word root *fract* in them. Is *fract* a word? [No.] It’s a very important part of the words *fracture* and *fraction*, however. We call *fract* a word root. It comes from a word in Latin that means ‘to break.’ Remember our discussion about the history of English and how so many words and word parts in English come from Greek and Latin languages? So, *fract* is a Latin word root and it lives on in the words *fracture* and *fraction*.”

“Word roots are everywhere! Let’s look at these words. [Mr. Ramirez writes *construct*, *construction*, and *structure* in a column on the board.] What’s the same in these three words? [Students point out *struct*.] Good! You’ve found the word root! Now, let’s think about what this word root might mean—think about what happens when construction

¹²¹ Moats, Louisa Cook. *Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2000, p. 76.

¹²² Ibid.

lists Greek and Latin roots.¹²⁶ Students can build these notebooks as they learn word parts over time and can reference them as they encounter unfamiliar words.

(4) Be clear with students that morphemic analysis does not always work. Without a doubt, morphemic analysis is a powerful tool for students to use. But as we all know, it does not always work perfectly. Let your students know this and as a class, consider examples of words that contain inconsistent prefixes (such as *in-*, which can mean both *not* and *into*), words that appear to have a prefix but have no meaningful base or root word (such as *intrigue*), and words whose meanings could be misconstrued if students simply use morphemic analysis (students might think that *unassuming* means *not assuming* instead of *modest*).¹²⁷

Teaching students how to examine meaningful word parts to determine a word's meaning gives them a strategy to use when they approach unfamiliar words in their reading. Additionally, understanding the morphological relationship between words will help students to improve their spelling. As students progress through elementary school and begin to encounter more content-specific words in their textbooks, a working knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, and Greek and Latin roots will be invaluable. Imagine how impressed a middle school earth science teacher will be when all of your former students are able to say, "I know about *hydrology*. It comes from Greek roots and it means the study of water!"

Using Context Clues

Given our earlier explanation of how difficult it is to determine word meaning from context, it may surprise you that we are examining how to do just that. It is true that many so-called context clues are not clear enough to allow students to ascertain the meaning of an unfamiliar word. It is also true that many of our students struggle to make meaning with even the most obvious clues. However, by providing our students with guidance on and practice in the *process* of using context to figure out word meaning, we can help them to add this word solving strategy to their expanding reading repertoire.

Isabel Beck, Margaret McKeown, and Linda Kucan suggest that teachers guide their students through the following five-step process as they attempt to use context to infer a word's meaning.

- First, the teacher and students **read and paraphrase** a section of the text, placing particular emphasis on the unfamiliar word.¹²⁸
- Next, the teacher helps the students to **establish meaning of the context** by asking students, "What's going on in this section? What's being said right here? Tell us what those sentences are all about."¹²⁹
- The third step is to ask students to give an **initial identification and rationale** for what the unfamiliar word might mean, being sure that they explain how the context supports their idea.¹³⁰
- In the next step, the teacher helps students to **consider further possibilities** and when appropriate, lets students know that it might not be possible to find one right meaning from the context.¹³¹
- Finally, the teacher asks students to **summarize** the ideas that were generated in the discussion in order to draw a conclusion about the meaning of the word.

¹²⁶ Ibid p. 165.

¹²⁷ Ibid p. 166.

¹²⁸ Beck, Isabel et al. *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York: Guilford Press, 2002, p. 108.

¹²⁹ Ibid p. 109.

¹³⁰ Ibid p. 109.

¹³¹ Ibid p. 110.

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Take a look at the following classroom example and consider how the teacher asks students to think critically about what's happening in a small chunk of a book as the class grapples with an unfamiliar word. Try to discern the steps of the process in action.

Teacher: "As for Rusty, he scowled at Mary before stamping out of the room. 'And I'm not coming back either, see!'" Now, let's kind of reread these sentences to figure out what's happening. Rusty does this *scowled* thing at Mary and then stamps out of the room. As he does this he says, "And I'm not coming back either, see!" What's happening in these sentences?

Student: Rusty is mad at Mary about something, and he stamped out of the room.

Teacher: Good, is there anything else?

Student: Well, he yelled at her as he went out the door that he wasn't coming back.

Teacher: What do you think *scowled* might mean?

Student: "Yelled."

Teacher: Why do you think it is "yelled"?

Student: Well, he is mad at her and then he yelled that he wasn't coming back.

Teacher: Let's look at the sentence with *scowled* again: "As for Rusty, he scowled at Mary before stamping out of the room." When someone stamps out of a room, what do you think they are feeling?

Student: Mad or upset.

Teacher: Right, so if Rusty is mad or upset, what are some things he might do at Mary?

Student: Yell or throw something.

Teacher: Can you think of some other possible meanings?

Student: Make faces at her.

Teacher: Why do you say "make faces at her"?

Student: If you are mad at someone, you might make a face at her before you stamp out of the room.

Teacher: Can you think of anything else *scowled* might mean?

Student: Shake your fist.

Teacher: What made you say that?

Student: I shake my fist when I'm mad at my sister.

Teacher: Great! So what do we know about *scowled*?

Student: It is something Rusty did at Mary.

Teacher: And...?

Student: He was mad because he stamped out of the room telling her he wasn't coming back. It could be "yelled" or "shook his fist" or "made an angry face at her."

Teacher: Any one of those might be possible meanings for *scowled* based on these sentences. *Scowled* **does** mean one that you suggested—"made an angry face."¹³²

As you can see from this example, it's critical that we ensure our students see using context clues as a *process* for grappling with possible word meanings, not as a quick way to produce one correct answer. Guide your students through this process many, many times, and they will begin to be able to use context as one way to determine word meaning in their own reading.

¹³² Ibid pp. 108-111.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the first piece of the reading comprehension puzzle—developing students’ oral language skills and vocabularies.

- First, we considered ways to build a classroom environment rich with language, a place that is ripe for incidental word learning. Teachers do this by using mature vocabulary repeatedly and in multiple contexts, and encouraging students to incorporate learned vocabulary into their comments and questions.
- Then, we examined how to choose and teach the specific vocabulary words that will help our students to become mature language users. Students’ vocabulary knowledge will increase if you abide by the following principles of effective vocabulary instruction: carefully choose a limited number of words and provide a direct, student-friendly explanation of their meanings, create meaningful interactions with the words in a variety of formats and contexts, and ensure the students have multiple exposures to the new words.
- Finally, we focused on how to teach word learning skills so that our students are able to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words independently. We must especially teach students how to use meaningful word parts (morphemic analysis) and context clues.

In the next chapter, we will turn our attention to the second part of reading comprehension instruction—comprehension strategies.

Methods of Comprehension Instruction II: Comprehension Strategies

Chapter Six

I. Behaviors of Active, Proficient Readers

II. Active Comprehension Strategies

We know that building independent readers is a lengthy and complicated process that requires explicit instruction in all areas of literacy. Ultimately, our goal is for all students to become active readers who understand any book, poem or article that they read. To truly understand how reading comprehension works, we need to examine each of three hierarchical levels of understanding that readers work through in order to make sense of a text.

Related Readings

Along with this chapter, please read the excerpt located in the Related Readings section at the end of this text:

- Put Reading First, pp. 53-66

First, readers have to “retrieve the meaning of each individual word encountered.”¹³³ This stage of comprehension requires the reader to use phonics and the alphabetic principle efficiently to decode words. To know what those decoded words mean, readers must have a broad vocabulary and the ability to decipher the meaning of unfamiliar words (using morphemic analysis or context clues, as described in the last chapter).

At the next level of reading comprehension, readers “collapse the meanings of individual words they have read into a composite interpretation.”¹³⁴ In other words, at certain points in the text, readers must pause to consider the significance of a whole string of words (researchers call this “recoding”). For skilled readers, “these interpretative pauses occur at major syntactic boundaries,” such as the ends of phrases, clauses, sentences, or paragraphs.¹³⁵ Possessing fluency and phrasing skills helps the reader know which words cluster together in a meaningful way and when to pause and recode (see chapter four for ways to build students’ fluency).

In the final stage of comprehension, “readers must combine their understanding of the just-interpreted phrase or clause with their overall interpretation of the text so as to revise and update their understanding of what the text means and where it is going.”¹³⁶ To fully understand at such a high level, readers have to recall both facts and events from earlier in the text, as well as information that rests entirely outside of the text, in the readers’ own background knowledge. When readers comprehend at this level, we believe that they truly understand what they have read.

Many teachers wonder if the hierarchical nature of these stages suggests that beginning readers, who are just learning to decode individual words, should only receive instruction in phonics and the alphabetic principle. Is it wise to spend instructional time guiding these young students to understand and interpret a whole story when they can’t yet decode most of its individual words? Research continues to mount suggesting that students *benefit greatly* from instruction in reading comprehension beginning in

¹³³ Adams, Marilyn Jager. *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, p. 140.

¹³⁴ *Ibid* p. 141.

¹³⁵ *Ibid* p. 141.

¹³⁶ *Ibid* p. 142.

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Kindergarten.¹³⁷ However, while all of our students need explicit instruction in how to understand their reading, the *context* in which that instruction occurs varies according to grade level and student need.¹³⁸ For students who are not yet able to read independently, comprehension instruction must occur in the context of a read aloud.

This chapter examines how to teach students to think critically about texts throughout the reading process. We will look at particular **comprehension strategies** that facilitate comprehension, including self-monitoring for meaning, making connections, using text structures, predicting, asking and answering questions, summarizing, visualizing, and inferring. In Part I, we will describe what active, proficient readers do during the reading process and contrast those behaviors with what struggling readers do as they approach texts. In Part II, we will take an in-depth look at the comprehension strategies that help proficient readers process and make sense of their reading.

Decoding				Comprehension				
Book and Print Awareness	Phonological and Phonemic Awareness	Phonics and The Alphabetic Principle	Word and Structural Analysis	Fluency			Background Knowledge	Vocabulary
				Sight Words	Automaticity	Phrasing		
Comprehension Strategies								

I. Behaviors of Active, Proficient Readers

As conscientious literacy teachers, our big goal is to lead our students to become active, proficient readers. How do we characterize this type of reader? In a broad sense, active readers are those who, while they are reading, constantly ask themselves, “What does this mean?” Active readers know that reading is much more than pronouncing words. They are on a constant quest for understanding and know that arriving at their own interpretation of a text requires a great deal of self-initiated, strategic thinking. Take a look at the following chart that outlines the specific comprehension behaviors of both active and struggling readers:

What Active Readers Do	What Struggling Readers Do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the extent and quality of their understanding • Apply comprehension strategies in order to repair break downs in comprehension • Search for connections between their prior knowledge and the new information they encounter in the texts they read • Ask questions of themselves, the author, and the text as they read • Draw inferences during and after reading • Distinguish important from less important ideas in text • Synthesize information within and across texts and reading experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not realize when comprehension breaks down • When aware that comprehension has broken down, do not know how to apply strategies to repair faulty comprehension • Are unaware that thinking should occur as they read, and read simply as a word call activity • Assume that the author’s interpretations are correct and do not ask many questions of themselves, the author, or the text • Do not “read between the lines” and assume that the meaning is restricted to what is literally written on the page • Are not able to distinguish between important events/facts and details; may emphasize the more interesting ideas over important ones

¹³⁷ Pressley, Michael. “Comprehension Instruction: What Makes Sense Now, What Might Make Sense Soon.” *Handbook of Reading Research: Volume III*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2000. Online at <http://www.readingonline.org/articles/handbook/pressley/index.html>, accessed 7/1/2010.

¹³⁸ Block, Cathy Collins and Michael Pressley. *Comprehension Instruction: Research-Based Best Practices*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2002, p. 144.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a purpose for each new reading experience • Adjust speed and strategies for texts of varying genres and levels of difficulty • Successfully apply word attack and context clue strategies when encountering vocabulary with which they are unfamiliar • Visualize details and events in a text to aid comprehension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach all new reading experiences the same way, not “prepping” their minds for the new information or setting a purpose • Do not adjust speed and strategies for more difficult texts • Skip or misread unknown vocabulary without stopping to clarify its pronunciation or meaning • Do not visualize details or try to make connections between the text and prior experiences or knowledge
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The word *active* provides an apt description of proficient readers. While these readers approach a text with the understanding that they will only get out of it what mental energy they put in to it, struggling readers are *passive*, assuming that comprehension just happens as they read words from the page. Passive readers who take such a “hands-off” (or perhaps more appropriately, “brain-off”) approach to reading attribute their comprehension difficulties to innate differences in ability between themselves and proficient readers. You’ll often hear a beginning or struggling reader say, “I’m just not a good reader.” These readers often have no idea of what good readers are actually doing to make meaning. In fact, they think the defining characteristic of good readers is that they “just get it,” with little effort required. Our job as literacy teachers is to ensure that the comprehension process used by proficient readers is not a mystery to our beginning and struggling readers. The next Part of this chapter will examine how we take the mystery out of reading comprehension for all of our students.

II. Active Comprehension Strategies

If we are to lead our students to take an active stance while reading, then our first task is to guide students to monitor their own comprehension, or as one class of second graders put it, “You’ve got to know when you know, and know when you don’t know.” Beginning and struggling readers need to understand that admitting when understanding breaks down is nothing to be ashamed of—in fact, it is a model behavior of good readers. Our second task is to make students aware that reading for understanding means that we have to *think* while we read and that thinking can happen in a variety of ways depending on the kind of text we are reading, the purpose for our reading, or the type of comprehension problem we are having. Let’s look closely at each of these strategies.

Comprehension Strategies—Ways of Thinking While Reading. Researchers have come to understand the wide variety of strategies that readers use to comprehend by asking adult volunteers to “think aloud” as they go through a text. Further studies have found that though comprehension involves more than 30 cognitive and metacognitive processes,¹³⁹ good readers use a small handful of these consistently to help them understand what they read.¹⁴⁰ In this section, we will examine eight high-utility comprehension strategies. We will consider the key elements of each strategy and the instructional methods that you will use to ensure that students understand how to use the strategy independently. Additionally, for some strategies, we will provide a window into an elementary literacy classroom to get a glimpse at what excellent strategy instruction looks like in action. The strategies that we will examine include:

- (1) Self-monitoring for meaning
- (2) Making connections
- (3) Using text structures to improve comprehension
- (4) Predicting

¹³⁹ Ibid p.3.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid p. 13.

Comprehension Strategies

- (5) Asking and answering questions
- (6) Summarizing
- (7) Visualizing
- (8) Making inferences

Self-Monitoring for Meaning—Knowing When You Know and When You Don't. From the earlier table comparing active and struggling readers, we know that struggling readers do not realize when their reading comprehension breaks down. Before any other type of comprehension instruction can happen, we have to be sure that we have made our students aware that good readers consistently monitor themselves while moving through texts, and that our students are increasingly able to demonstrate that they know when they understand and when they don't.

Of course, you will model this for your students, stopping during a read aloud to say, "You know, I don't think I understood that last bit. It didn't really make sense to me. I need to do something to fix my problem." You'll stop a student during an independent reading conference to ask, "Do you understand that?" And finally, after much modeling and prompting, you will congratulate your students on being excellent thinkers when they look up at you with furrowed brows and say, "I don't get this."

The next instructional step, of equal importance as the first, is to teach students *how* to fix a problem they've identified in their comprehension. And to do that, you will model specific strategies, such as rereading the confusing part or continuing to read to see if something further on in the text will clear up their confusion. But before students can fix a comprehension problem, they have to know it's there. Therefore, teaching students to monitor for meaning and assessing whether or not they are doing it should be a major focus of your reading instruction, particularly at the beginning of the school year.

Making Connections. Proficient readers make connections between what they are reading in a book or article and their own background knowledge of the topic or central theme. We categorize these connections as *text-to-self* (a connection between the reading and the reader's personal life), *text-to-text* (a connection between two texts), and *text-to-world* (a connection between a text and a reader's world knowledge) and help students to know that all types of connections are useful if they relate to the central concept of the book.

Not surprisingly, some texts lend themselves to deep, meaningful connections more than others. For this reason, it is important to choose texts carefully as students begin using this comprehension strategy. This is true both for texts that you will read aloud and for those students will read in a shared setting. If you want to model using text-to-self connections to enhance understanding, then you have to choose a book to which you can connect in an authentic way. Texts that comment on common human experiences are often good candidates for text-to-self connections; books by Patricia Polacco, who writes about her own childhood and family experiences, are excellent selections. Collections of texts that share a similar theme or lesson, that use similar formats or

I've spent a lot of time this year teaching my students how to make profound connections and distinguish between an ordinary connection and a profound one. In previous years, I would hear a lot of connections like, "I'm 11 years old, just like Stanley from the book." I knew my students could go deeper with their connections and I knew that if they did, their comprehension and love of reading would dramatically improve. After introducing and modeling basic connections, we went deeper. When Ivan said that profound connections were when you stopped reading and thought hard about the book and your life and Roxana followed up by saying that you had to give details to explain your connection, we were on our way to a common definition of profound connections. For elementary students this is deep, critical thinking that they are capable of and that, I hope, will remain with them for the rest of their lives.

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structure, or that are written by the same author help students make meaningful text-to-text connections (in addition to *Yoko* and *Oliver Button is a Sissy*, students might read *Arnie and the New Kid*, *William's Doll*, and *Odd Velvet*.) To help students make rich text-to-world connections, choose books that relate to world events and problems.

To understand how you might begin to guide your students to make text-to-self connections, consider the following snapshot of first grade teacher Debbie Miller's classroom during Read Aloud:

It was early in the school year. The windows were still open wide to the late summer breezes. Debbie held in her lap *The Two of Them* by Alike, a book rich in connections to her own life. She decided a central concept for the book, and therefore the focus of her modeling or think-alouds, is the idea of oral narrative as a way to preserve a family's history.

Debbie began. "Okay, you guys, this is how it's going to work. When I'm reading, you'll see me looking at the book and showing you the pictures like I always do. I'm going to read the book all the way through one time. Then, I'll go back, and as I reread, you'll see me stop and think aloud about some things I know or have experienced that are like the book in some way. I'll probably look up at the ceiling, so you'll know I'm telling you what I was just thinking as I read the book."

Debbie read through the book once and then began to reread Alike's book about a young child and her grandfather and how their roles reverse as he ages and eventually dies.

She read six pages before stopping to look up. "When I read this part about the grandfather singing songs and telling his granddaughter stories of long ago," Debbie said, "I remember my own grandfather. He used to gather all the grandchildren around him and tell us the stories that were true for our family, just like the grandpa in this book. It was like he wanted us to know those stories before he died, and he was afraid if he didn't tell them, they might be forgotten forever. When I read those words, I could see all of us sitting around him. There were too many grandchildren to sit in his lap like the little girl in this book, but he told us stories about my mom and my aunts and uncles. And you know what? When I had children, I told them those same stories so they would remember all the different people in my family." Debbie closed the book on her lap for a moment to show she was shifting gears.

"When a book makes me think of my own life," Debbie said, "I'm making text-to-self connections—you know, connections from the text or book to myself."

She stopped to write *text-to-self* on the far left side of a six-foot length of horizontally hung chart paper labeled *Making Schema Connections* (schema refers to background knowledge) that hung on the wall nearby. She wrote the title of the book under the *text-to-self* connections heading and put her initials by it.

Debbie continued reading, pausing two more times to think aloud about text connections to herself. By the time she finished, the children stared intently at her, as if she just surgically opened her head so that they could look inside to see how her brain works. They were captivated by this simple demonstration... many glimpsed, for the first time that day, the thinking processes of a proficient reader.

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(Several days later)... Referring to *The Two of Them*, she told her students that, by thinking about her own grandfather, she could imagine how the little girl felt when her grandfather held her on his lap for stories, and how the little girl must have felt later when the grandfather died. Debbie told the class, “By remembering my own feelings, I could imagine what the little girl—the character—in this book might have felt. Because I understand the character’s feelings, I understand the story better. It makes more sense to me and means more to me.”¹⁴¹

Notice how Debbie is deliberate in:

- Her text choice (“a book rich in connections to her own life”),
- Her explanation of how she’ll think aloud (“I’ll probably look up at the ceiling, so you’ll know I’m telling you what I was just thinking as I read the book”),
- Her description of the strategy (“When a book makes me think of my own life, I’m making text-to-self connections—you know, connections from the text or book to myself.”), and
- Her clarification of how the strategy helped her understand the book (“By remembering my own feelings, I could imagine what the little girl in this book might have felt. Because I understand the character’s feelings, I understand the story better. It makes more sense to me and means more to me.”).

This level of explicitness is necessary if our students are going to internalize how to use a strategy to help them understand what they read.

Using Text Structures to Improve Comprehension. Research has repeatedly shown that when students understand how different types of texts are structured, they are better able to understand the information read within. Imagine how difficult it would be to understand a magazine article if you didn’t know to read the text on the page before examining a related graph, or how frustrating it would be to attempt to make sense of a comic strip in the Sunday paper if you were unaware of the function of dialogue bubbles! Knowing how a text is organized helps students to read in a more purposeful and efficient fashion.

Children are sensitive to the narrative structure of a story (characters, setting, problem, etc.); studies have found that even preschool age children are able to use these narrative elements to help them comprehend.¹⁴² Nevertheless, many beginning readers, and all struggling readers, need explicit guidance in identifying and analyzing elements of narrative story structure. Many teachers organize these elements visually through a graphic organizer called a story map. After modeling use of a story map during Read Aloud, beginning and struggling readers will be able to use it independently to build comprehension of narratives.

The structure of expository texts is less intuitive for children and thus, must be taught directly. Consider how Shannen Coleman (Baltimore ’03) and Diana Filo (Baltimore ’04), using suggestions from Debbie Miller’s *Reading with Meaning*, helped their second grade students understand and use nonfiction text features:

We began the nonfiction unit by asking our students to compare fiction and nonfiction Big Books that we read during Read Aloud. We used a Venn diagram to record students’ observations about the features, purposes, and ways of reading both types of texts. Next,

¹⁴¹ Keene, Ellin Oliver and Susan Zimmermann. *Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader’s Workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997, pp. 56-57.

¹⁴² Joanna P. Williams. *Comprehension Instruction: Research-Based Best Practices*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2002, p. 127.

we asked our students to work in small groups and classify a text as fiction or nonfiction, being sure to explain their decisions.

Our next step was to help our students understand how to predict what you might learn from a nonfiction text by skimming the cover, table of contents, and some of the pages. We asked students to skim several Big Books and make a prediction as to what they would learn if they went looking for information in that particular book.

The next stage of instruction was lengthy. Each day, we examined one text feature, including labels, photographs, captions, comparisons, maps, types of print, headings, graphs, tables of contents, indexes, and glossaries. If the focus for the day was on types of texts, we would choose a Big Book that had examples of words in bold print or italics and explain how the feature helped us understand better—in this case, by drawing our attention to the most important words or ideas. On a big chart, we recorded the text feature and how it helped us understand our nonfiction reading.

In Shared Reading, we guided our students to examine a copy of a nonfiction trade book, found the text feature in question, and talked about how it helped them understand the text. The students *loved* these books and were very engaged as they read about *Rollercoaster Science* and the inner workings of an *Ice Cream Factory*. Additionally, we asked our students to create a nonfiction text notebook to record an example of each text feature. For instance, when we learned about photographs and captions, our students pasted a photograph of their choosing on a page of their notebook and wrote a caption to give more information about it. In this way, our students created a reference book for themselves of all the nonfiction features we studied.

To determine whether our students' reading comprehension improved, we gave them weekly assessments that measured how well they were able to use the text features we had studied that week to understand a short expository text. We asked questions like, "On what page could you find information about centrifugal force?" that required students to use a particular text feature (the Table of Contents or index) to complete the task. The unit was very successful; our students were engaged and became much better at understanding nonfiction books and articles. Now, nonfiction books are among the most popular selections in our classroom libraries!

Teaching students to understand the structure of expository texts makes this kind of reading less intimidating for students. Given the natural curiosity of most elementary school students, their desire to read nonfiction will skyrocket if you provide them with a rich understanding of how this type of text works—and how to make it work for them. For an example of a page from a student's nonfiction text notebook, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 46: "Sample Products: Evidence of Strategic Thinking About Reading"); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

Making Predictions

Predicting is a way of thinking, related to making connections and inferring, that asks readers to use what they know about a genre, a character, a particular story structure, an author, or a historical or common human experience to make an intelligent guess about what might happen in a story or what they might learn from an informational text. Readers can make predictions before they begin reading as well as during their reading. Lead your students to understand that predicting helps the reader to stay involved in understanding and enjoying their reading.

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Predicting comes almost naturally to many readers. However, we can push our students to make sophisticated predictions that require them to think critically about the text by asking them to explain the thinking behind their prediction. For instance, a second grader who reads *Stephanie's Ponytail* by Robert Munsch might predict that all of the students in Stephanie's class will copy her latest hairstyle—a side ponytail. Instead of letting that very valid prediction stand, the teacher should challenge the student to explain why she made the prediction, forcing her to connect her guess to the predictable pattern of this story (the students *always* wear their hair exactly as Stephanie does, regardless of how ridiculous the styles become). A fourth grader reading *The Gold Cadillac* by Mildred Taylor might predict that Daddy will experience some sort of trouble when he drives his fancy car into Mississippi and explain this prediction by noting the setting of the book (the Deep South in the 1950s) and his own background knowledge of that time period (African Americans were discriminated against and expected to defer to white people during the Jim Crow era).

Additionally, we need to make clear for students that good readers are constantly confirming or revising their predictions while they read. By pausing during reading to ask students if they are surprised by what is happening in a story or if what they are learning in an informational article differs from what they expected to learn, we encourage them to “revise and update their understanding of what the text means and where it is going,”¹⁴³ evidence of high level thinking.

For a more complete example of a lesson about predicting, you may want to turn back to chapter two of this text and reread the Shared Reading classroom snapshot that described students making predictions about *The Tortoise and the Hare*.

For an example of work that students might produce as they predict, see the online **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 47: “Sample Products: Evidence of Strategic Thinking About Reading”). ✕

Asking and Answering Questions

Many of our beginning and struggling readers, having assumed that good readers are never confused about the meaning of a book, are shocked to learn that good readers always have questions about their reading. This misunderstanding moves asking and answering questions near the top of the metacognitive strategies that we can teach our students to use. The following key ideas will help your students understand the strategy and how it helps reading comprehension:

- Good readers ask questions before, during, and after their reading.
- Questions have different purposes; some attempt to clarify the meaning of a part of text, others are used to wonder about what will happen, and still others help the reader to speculate about the author's intent, style, content, or format.¹⁴⁴
- Some questions can be answered by referring back to the text, while others require the reader to make an inference. Sometimes, you can answer a question by asking someone else to share information in his or her background knowledge or by consulting an outside source (like a dictionary or other reference material).
- Good readers ask questions to focus on parts of the text that are most important to understand or to be aware of the parts that are most difficult for them to understand.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Adams, Marilyn Jager. *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, p. 142.

¹⁴⁴ Keene, Ellin Oliver and Susan Zimmermann. *Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader's Workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997, p. 110.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid* p. 114.

Once you have encouraged students to ask questions, you will probably find that they have a million! And because no reader has time to answer all of his or her questions, it's important to teach students how to identify those that are most central to an understanding of the reading. For Kindergarten through second grade students, it's helpful to ask them to pick a "burning question," one that they *must* spend time thinking and talking about in order to better understand their reading. After the class has selected a "burning question," lead them to decide how they might find an answer to that question. For questions about fiction, you might point out to students that often, the most interesting and important questions are those that we can't answer simply by looking back in the text, but must be inferred.

Additionally, you might help upper elementary students distinguish between thick questions (those that are about large, global matters) and thin questions (those that seek clarification of minor points).¹⁴⁷ Thick questions often begin with *why* and *how come* or could address large content area issues, such as "Why was the Boston Tea Party important?" Thin questions, such as "What year did the Boston Tea Party happen?" can often be answered with a short, simple response. Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis, authors of *Strategies that Work*, recommend having students write their thick questions on large sticky notes and their thin questions on smaller sticky flags to help them "separate broad concepts from smaller issues of clarification."¹⁴⁸

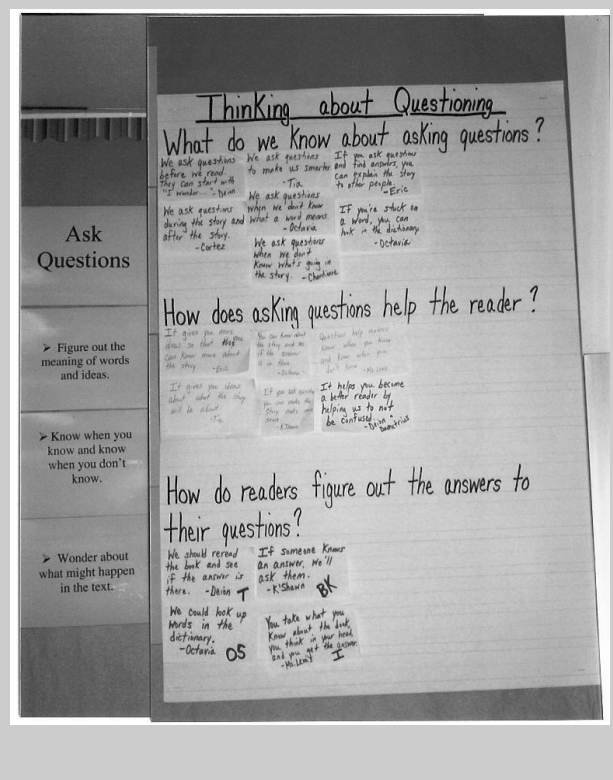
By gradually teaching students to ask questions, to identify how they can find the answers to their questions, and to determine which questions are most important for understanding, we can ensure that students have one more tool to use as they think strategically about their reading.

Summarizing

Teaching students to summarize, first an individual paragraph and then an entire story or article, helps them to "discern and stress the most important ideas, minimize less relevant details, and remove redundant ideas."¹⁴⁹ Once students are able to summarize, they will also possess a whole host of important skills, such as the ability to determine what's important in a text, to comprehend the essence of a passage, and to remember and retell what they have read.

To truly know whether students have "gotten the gist" of what they have read, many teachers ask them to write a summary in their own words. Fifth graders reading an article from an informational magazine like

Sample Anchor Chart Created During *Asking and Answering Questions Strategy Unit*¹⁴⁶



¹⁴⁶ Miller, Debbie. *Reading with Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2002, p. 127.

¹⁴⁷ Harvey, Stephanie and Anne Goudvis. *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding*. Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 2000, p. 89.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid p. 90.

¹⁴⁹ Trabasso, Tom and Edward Bouchard. *Comprehension Instruction: Research-Based Best Practices*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2002, p. 182.

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Time for Kids might write a summary sentence on a sticky note and attach it to the appropriate section of text.¹⁵⁰ In a reading response journal, fourth graders might separate a page into two columns, identifying the topic or subtopic on the left-hand side, and the important supporting details on the right. By reading students' written summaries, you can determine if they are identifying the most important ideas or simply noting those that they find most interesting.

Visualizing

When readers visualize, or as we might say to first graders, "draw pictures in our minds," they create an image that is "sparked by the text, but anchored in one's background knowledge."¹⁵¹ Make students aware that illustrators use this particular comprehension strategy when they receive the author's text and decide which pictures should accompany it, but that none of us have to be exemplary artists to draw pictures in our minds. In addition to increasing our enjoyment and understanding of a text, research suggests that the imagery created during reading creates a visual "memory representation of the reader's interpretation of text."¹⁵²

When students are just beginning to visualize, it helps to offer specific suggestions for when they might make a mental picture, such as, "Make pictures in your mind about what's happening right now in the story," "Make pictures in your mind about this particular character," or "Make pictures in your mind about what we're learning about the water cycle." Of course, asking your students to sketch their mental images will help you assess their comprehension and will be fun for them.

Make your students aware that each person's mental images are unique and valid because all of us have unique experiences and background knowledge that influence what we see in our minds as we read. If you doubt the power of an individual's visual interpretation, think about what often happens when you watch a movie that is based on a book that you love and have read many times. You probably leave that movie thinking, "That's not what that character looks like, or sounds like, at all!" because you had imagined things differently. Teaching our students to visualize during reading helps them to create their own interpretations and permanently connect a book or a character to the images they have created.

Making Inferences

As Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis tell us, "Inferring is the bedrock of comprehension, not only in reading... Inferring is about reading faces, reading body language, reading expressions and reading tone, as well as reading text."¹⁵³ Teaching students to infer is one of the most powerful tools to use as we help students become active, proficient readers. When students know how to use their background knowledge to examine textual clues, they can extrapolate a meaning that is not explicitly stated. Particularly for deep, thought-provoking literature, the meaning of a passage is almost always hidden "between the lines," and students will only be able to understand that meaning if they are adept enough at making inferences to read between those lines.

Consider the following example, taken from *Strategies that Work*, of two teachers (Steph and Jennifer) guiding their fifth grade students to make inferences about *Tight Times* by Barbara Shook Hazen. This

¹⁵⁰ Harvey, Stephanie and Anne Goudvis. *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding*. Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 2000, p. 148.

¹⁵¹ Keene, Ellin Oliver and Susan Zimmermann. *Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader's Workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997, p. 141.

¹⁵² Trabasso, Tom and Edward Bouchard. *Comprehension Instruction: Research-Based Best Practices*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2002, p. 179.

¹⁵³ Harvey, Stephanie and Anne Goudvis. *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding*. Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 2000, p. 105.

picture book tells the story of a young boy whose desperate desire for a dog is overshadowed by the tension that exists within his family after his dad loses his job.

On this day, Steph read *Tight Times* while the kids crowded around on the floor with clipboards and pencils at the ready. She held up the cover of the book, which shows a boy with a plate of lima beans, his fork two inches from his mouth holding one lonely lima which he refuses to even look at. Knowing that covers and illustrations are a good place to start with inferring, Steph asked what they could infer from the cover.

“He doesn’t like those beans,” Curtis answered. “How do you know?” Steph asked. “Look at his face and how he won’t put the fork in his mouth,” Curtis said. “Yeah, and his plate is still full of beans,” D.J. added as the others nodded.

“What does *Tight Times* mean?” Les asked. This proved tougher. No one seemed to have adequate background knowledge for this term. Steph hung up a large piece of chart paper and divided it into two columns, one headed **Quote or Picture from Text** and the other headed **Inference**. “Let’s read the story and find out,” she suggested. “We’ll record the information here as we find it.” After hearing several pages, Audra burst out, “I’ve got it! ‘Tight times’ is when you don’t have enough money to do the stuff you want to do.”

“Good thinking, Audra. Did the author tell you that?” Steph asked. “No, not exactly.” “So, how did you know?” Steph asked. “I sort of guessed it when his dad said they didn’t get roast beef anymore and his mom went back to work because of tight times,” Audra answered. “She inferred it,” Curtis said. “That she did, Curtis. Let’s record it on the chart,” Steph suggested. Audra came up and wrote her response on the chart.

When Curtis came upon a picture near the end of the story of the dad reading the want ads, he headed up to the chart and wrote that the dad was going to get a new job. When Jennifer asked Curtis how he knew that, he answered, “Because he’s got a smile on his face in that picture and he’s a hardworking guy. I’m predicting it.”

“Right on, Curtis,” Jennifer told him. At that point, she and Steph released the kids to work in pairs as the teachers moved about the room, eavesdropped, and chatted with individuals who were working their way through the text and responding on an identical form on their clipboards. The kids relied on both pictures and text to predict outcomes, infer ideas, and construct meaning in the story.¹⁵⁴

For an example of work that students might produce as they begin to infer, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 48: “Sample Products: Evidence of Strategic Thinking About Reading”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFSANet. ✖

Clearly, teaching our students to infer, as well as to use the other comprehension strategies we’ve described, will lead them to become the kind of independent, active readers who are able to arrive at their own interpretations of many different texts. Thus far in the chapter, we have considered the behaviors of active, proficient readers and how to teach our students to think strategically while they read. The table on the following page serves to review these strategies, and to clarify when in the reading process they are used.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid pp. 107-108.

Comprehension Strategies

Strategy	Description	Stage of reading in which strategy is used		
		Before	During	After
Self-Monitoring	Assessing your comprehension of text		x	x
Making Connections	Connecting what you are reading with what you already know—from your own life, another text, or the world	x	x	x
Using Text Structures	Understanding how different types of texts are structured and using those structures to help you understand your reading	x	x	x
Predicting	Using your background knowledge and what you know about a text (its genre, characters, or story structure) to determine what might happen or what you might learn	x	x	
Asking and Answering Questions	Asking a question to help clarify meaning and determining what kind of thinking will help you arrive at an answer	x	x	x
Summarizing	Restating the most important information in a text, often in written form		x	x
Visualizing	Using the images you create in your mind to help you understand		x	x
Inferring	Using your background knowledge and textual clues to interpret the meaning of text	x	x	x

Teaching Students to Become Strategic Thinkers

Now that we've considered particular comprehension strategies, let's examine how to teach students to use them. Not surprisingly, comprehension strategy instruction is no different than excellent instruction in other areas and follows the same steps as all direct instruction lessons (explain the strategy explicitly, model using the strategy, allow students to practice it with support, and provide opportunities for students to apply the strategies to their own reading).

To begin, **describe the strategy** in everyday language and **explain how it helps readers** better understand their reading. Next, **model using the strategy** by reading aloud and pausing your oral reading to "think aloud." Thinking aloud is a way of sharing how you are thinking at particular points during reading to make seemingly invisible mental processes visible to students; it allows students to "get inside the head" of a proficient reader. As you explain and use a particular comprehension strategy with your students, keep track of their thinking by **creating anchor charts** (such as the example in our discussion of the asking and answering questions strategy) "that children can refer to, add to, or change over the course of the year."¹⁵⁵

After modeling the strategy and thinking aloud for students, **gradually involve them** in using it. Students of all grade levels will share their thinking by engaging in conversations, with the teacher serving as facilitator. For Kindergarten through early second graders, Read Aloud will be *the context* in which they practice thinking strategically about text, for a number of reasons. First, as we have discussed previously, beginning readers must devote all of their cognitive energy to decoding print and reading fluently. Asking these students to decode *and* practice using a comprehension strategy will frustrate both their attempts to decode and their attempts to understand. Second, the books that these earlier readers can decode are often not suitable for in-depth strategic thinking. Truly, there is only so much thinking to be done with a

¹⁵⁵ Miller, Debbie. *Reading with Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2002, p. 12.

decodable text about an everyday experience that follows a predictable pattern. (A book about winter weather might read, “I put on my hat. I put on my gloves. I put on my coat.” There is little critical and inferential thought required of the reader in order to understand this kind of story.)

Though our primary students will practice strategic thinking during Read Aloud only, beginning in the middle of second grade, students should also practice using comprehension strategies during Shared and Independent Reading. Some of the best **guided instruction** of comprehension strategies happens when teachers “lift” short sections of texts from longer books or articles, make that snippet visible for all students (by

displaying it on the overhead or chart paper, or by making a photocopy for each student), and guide students to “reason through” the meaning of that lifted snippet by engaging them in conversation.¹⁵⁷ Though students may write in a response journal or use a graphic organizer as they think, the class conversation to “reason through” a text is perhaps the most powerful method of building students’ understanding of what they’ve read.

A word of caution about how you emphasize these strategies. Do not lose sight of the fact that strategies are a

Teaching metacognitive skills is an important literacy skill. Students need to understand how they think about reading. One way that I do this is to model my thought process when I am reading. Each morning, I read to students for twenty minutes. I stop periodically throughout the story, hold a paper light bulb above my head to show that I am thinking out loud, and begin to talk to myself about what I read. The kids love this!

David Jernigan,
Executive Director, KIPP Schools

A Teacher Think-Aloud, Visualizing During Reading

The teacher reads aloud a portion of a short story, *The Desert Man*, and thinks aloud about the mental images that are sparked by the text. Below, the text (**bold print**) is interspersed with the teacher’s think aloud (*in italics*).

*The title of the story is **The Desert Man**... I have a pretty good picture in my mind of what the desert looks like. Miles and miles of sand, blazing hot, very little vegetation.*

The old man was hot and tired. His long white robe billowed in the dry desert wind.

My picture in my head is of a very old man... He is dressed in a long white robe, and the material must be light enough to be blown by the wind. I can see his robe blowing in the wind.

He wiped his brow as he started to trudge up yet another of the endless dunes of the desert. He saw only and sea of sand surrounding him.

I can see in my own mind what the old man sees... miles and miles of hot desert... perhaps he is wiping his brow because he is so tired and weary.

The sun beat down on him mercilessly. He would not give up. He knew the camp was near.

The look on the old man’s face is very clear to me now. He has a look of determination on his face. He is very determined to make it to the camp.¹⁵⁶

means to an end: improved reading comprehension. As reading researchers Sinatra, Brown, and Reynolds explain, “Teachers can help students put strategy use in its proper place by minimizing its ‘trappings’ (e.g., numerous and/or intricate steps, written products) and by focusing on how the strategy aids comprehension. It may also help to remind students that the goal is to make sense of what the read and that the strategy is just a tool they can use to make that happen.”¹⁵⁸ Ask your students to explain how using a particular strategy helps them to understand their reading and look for evidence of increased reading comprehension in your student’s written and oral responses to books, articles, or textbooks.

¹⁵⁶ Gambrell, Linda B. and Patricia S. Koskinen. *Comprehension Instruction: Research-Based Best Practices*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2002, p. 313.

¹⁵⁷ Harvey, Stephanie and Anne Goudvis. *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding*. Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 2000, pp. 32-35.

¹⁵⁸ Sinatra, Gale M., Kathleen J. Brown and Ralph E. Reynolds. *Comprehension Instruction: Research-Based Best Practices*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2002, p. 71.

Comprehension Strategies

Finally, you will continually **check for student understanding** and increased reading comprehension. Initially, you might ask third through fifth graders to produce concrete evidence of successful strategy use. For example, students might use a Venn diagram to record connections they believe exist between two short stories, or they might draw the pictures that they are visualizing in their head while reading poetry. However, “as students become more proficient at strategy use, fade out requirements.”¹⁵⁹ Keep in mind the following advice from reading researchers:

Ongoing requirements for students to demonstrate their use of the strategy overtly may keep them focused on its deliberate use. This may actually interfere with the development of automatic comprehension processes. After all, expert readers do not produce concrete evidence of strategy use every time they encounter a text; in fact, they may do so only under duress. With this in mind, once students develop satisfactory prowess at the tasks that demonstrate strategy use, teachers should fade out task requirements. From then on, assessment should center on students’ comprehension of texts that lend themselves to the use of a particular strategy.¹⁶⁰

Conclusion

This chapter surveyed a wide variety of comprehension strategies that can be used at different points during the reading process to help develop students into strategic thinkers who comprehend their reading.

- Our goal is for our students to become active, proficient readers who self-monitor for meaning, recognize when comprehension breaks down, and know what to do to improve a shallow or incomplete understanding of a text.
- To help students to think critically about texts, teach them to self-monitor for meaning, make connections between prior knowledge and the text, use text structures to improve comprehension, make predictions, ask and answer questions, summarize, visualize, and make inferences.
- Help students to realize that understanding our reading begins before we open the book and continues well after we have read the last page. Teach students to think strategically before, during, and after reading.
- Teach students to think strategically about text by describing strategies explicitly, modeling and thinking aloud about our own reading, creating anchor charts to track our students’ thinking, guiding our students to think critically about texts by lifting parts of texts and “reasoning through” them in class conversations, and by checking for student understanding, use of the strategies, and improved reading comprehension.

I was shocked to discover that direct instruction could be effective to teach higher-level comprehension skills to my second and third graders. Somehow my modeling of predicting, clarifying, making connections, etc. while I read has sunk in. When I asked my students to read a story on their own and record their thinking on post-it notes in the margins of their books, I was astonished (and pleased) at how much they had gotten and how independently they were able to demonstrate these skills.

**Regan Kelly, Los Angeles ‘99
Vice President, Eastern Region
Lighthouse Academies**

¹⁵⁹ Ibid p. 72.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Methods of Writing Instruction

Chapter Seven

I. The Basic Building Blocks of Writing

II. Instructional Contexts Along a Continuum of Teacher Directedness

III. The Writing Process: Pre-Writing, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing

Although we have artificially separated reading and writing instruction to clearly explain them both, we must start this chapter by reiterating that reading and writing are inextricably intertwined skills and processes. We cannot and should not separate the teaching of reading from the teaching of writing. As you will see, the component skills of reading and writing are most effectively taught in connection with one other. In fact, students achieve the greatest academic gains when their teachers effectively harness the synergy of the reading-writing partnership. As Marilyn Jager Adams notes, “Children’s achievements in reading and writing are quite strongly and positively related... an emphasis on writing activities results in gains in reading achievement.”¹⁶¹

Chapter Overview

We will approach the subject of writing instruction from three, overlapping angles:

Part I—The Basic Building Blocks of Writing

First, we will examine the basic building blocks of writing, such as spelling, grammar, and handwriting. Students become effective writers more quickly when we teach these fundamental mechanics explicitly and then ask students to put the building blocks into practice by writing with varying levels of teacher support.

Part II—Instructional Contexts Along a Continuum of Teacher Directedness

In Part II, we will explore a series of the most effective instructional contexts for writing that fall along a broad continuum of teacher-directedness. As you recall, a fundamental tenet of excellent literacy instruction is that the teacher leads students toward independence as active readers and writers by providing increasingly less guidance and support over time. While most of us will teach in ways that fall on several places on this continuum on any given day, as a general matter, successful teachers of writing are those that lead their students toward self-reliance in the writing process. To that end, we will survey five contexts in which to teach writing—Modeled Writing, Shared Writing, Interactive Writing, Guided Writing, and Independent Writing—each method more student-driven than the last.

Part III—The Writing Process: Pre-Writing, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing

In order for students to write independently, they need to know and be able to use the five-step writing process: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. In Part III of this chapter, we will consider the writing process itself, looking closely at techniques teachers use to teach the its five steps. Of course, this framework is not meant to be an alternative to (and is not in tension with) the various methods discussed in Part II. In fact, all of the stages of the writing process can be taught through Modeled, Shared, Interactive, Guided, and Independent Writing.

¹⁶¹ Adams, Marilyn Jager. *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, p. 375.

Methods of Writing Instruction

I. The Basic Building Blocks of Writing

Reading and writing are complex, interrelated processes. To read, we break apart a string of letters, decide which sounds those letters represent, and put the sounds back together to determine the word. To spell, we translate the sounds that we hear in speech into written letters. In this way, reading and spelling are opposite but related activities. For this reason, much of the information gleaned in Chapter Three, “The Building Blocks of Literacy,” will be useful as you guide your students toward writing proficiency. In this section, we will consider some guidelines for teaching spelling, grammar, and handwriting.

Invented and Conventional Spelling

Children proceed through a relatively predictable set of sequential stages in learning to write. They first scribble, and then make linear, repetitive drawings that might resemble cursive in English. Children in this emergent stage may use a few very familiar letters, primarily those contained in their names, to spell all words (you might be surprised that four-year old Dominic would write *MDNC* for *float*). Next, children begin to write letters that represent beginning and ending sounds in words (writing *ft* for *float*), and progress to include some consonant blends and vowels (*flot* for *float*). As they understand more of the patterns that influence spelling, children will be able to spell most single syllable words with phonetic accuracy (*flote* for *float*) but will have difficulty spelling across syllables (*confedent* for *confident*). In the final stage, children are able to spell most words correctly, though they may make small errors in the spelling of words containing silent letters or those derived from other languages (*inditement* for *indictment*).¹⁶³

Spelling and Handwriting?

“Adults may wince at painful childhood memories of penmanship lessons and spelling tests. A small but growing number of studies, though, suggest that systematically teaching handwriting and spelling might actually help some students write more and do it better.”¹⁶²

As children are motivated to write, their interest in communicating inevitably outpaces their knowledge of proper spelling. If we accept that students’ interest in communicating should take precedence over correct spelling, we are able to ensure that students’ interest in communicating does **not** outpace their ability to write. We simply have to allow young children to “write” in less conventional ways.

Kindergarten through second grade teachers in particular should keep in mind that “invented spelling” is a critical part of the literacy developmental process. Children who are using invented spelling are demonstrating that they are concentrating on the sound/symbol relationship and then trying to encode it themselves. At first this process doesn’t reflect all the patterns that apply to a language (mostly because the student simply hasn’t learned them all yet), so a teacher may see many words that are conventionally misspelled, but still reflect a growing knowledge of the sound/symbol relationship.

chrane → *train*

dwg → *dog*

fesh → *fish*

n → *and*

There is some controversy about when the transition from invented to conventional spelling should occur. Different students will reach the stage where they are consistently using conventional spelling at different times. Usually by upper elementary, students should not be encouraged to use invented spelling, but rather to use resources to find the correct or standard spelling of words.

¹⁶² Viadero, Debra. “Studies Back Lessons in Writing, Spelling.” *Educational Leadership*, November 20, 2002.

¹⁶³ Bear, Donald R. et al. *Words Their Way: Words Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction*, 3rd Edition. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004, pp. 11-20.

The bottom line is that invented spelling *should* be encouraged when it signals that students are using their knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences to reach beyond the spelling patterns they have been taught. We do not want inability to spell a word to stop students from writing. However, conventional spelling is the ultimate goal, and students should be held responsible for spelling words and word patterns that they have been taught.

Guidelines for Teaching Spelling

All students benefit from systematic spelling instruction and practice, and students who are experiencing difficulty in spelling need intensive instruction and practice tailored to match their individual levels of word knowledge.

No matter what grade, no matter what level, kids will ask you how to spell whichever word they want to use. Teach them spelling strategies (including to just sound it out if they don't have any clue), and then let them make mistakes. If you don't, they'll never become independent writers. Then you can use those mistakes that they make to guide your instruction to spelling objectives that they need help with.

Shannon Dingle, RGV '03

Strategically select spelling words. Depending on your school's curriculum, you may be handed lists of words that students must learn to spell each week that connect with the broader curriculum. If not, be sure that you select words that include the spelling patterns that you have taught and include words from the curriculum or other content areas. Always begin the year with more frequently used and regular word patterns before moving to less frequently used and less regular patterns.

Here are some other general guidelines for spelling instruction:

- **Review frequently.** Improving students' spelling accuracy requires that you review previously taught material often. For example, if you are teaching your first graders the *vowel consonant e* spelling pattern, you will ask them to spell words that contain that pattern *and* some sound-spelling relationships that they learned earlier in the year. When they blend and write *kite*, they'll be forced to consider why the /k/ sound is spelled with a *k* and not a *c*. Revisiting spelling patterns often keeps them fresh in students' minds. For the same reason, it is also useful to provide students with opportunities to analyze and sort words into categories to focus students' attention on the spelling and letter patterns that they have already learned.
- **Limit the number of words in one lesson.** Expect that students will need to read and work with words many times before they are able to spell them. To give enough practice with each word, do not make your lists too long.
- **Teach students the process of monitoring and checking their spelling.** Ask students to double-check their work for spelling and maintain high expectations for correct spelling of previously taught words.
- **Differentiate spelling instruction.** For students who experience spelling difficulty, provide individual or small group instruction to help them hear the sounds in words and connect those sounds to letters. With a small group of students, you might model how to stretch out a word and segment it into individual sounds, then use spelling cards or phonics charts to prompt students for the correct spelling of those sounds. Students with audioprocessing disorders will struggle to hear the component sounds in a word, so remind them to pay attention to their mouths as they say the word slowly.

Methods of Writing Instruction

- **Provide immediate feedback.** As students transition from inventive to conventional spelling, be swift and consistent with correcting the spelling of the words that you have already taught. Do not let students reinforce errors once the word has been taught.
- **Connect it to their writing.** Especially in the upper elementary classroom, drawing a portion of their spelling words from trends you see in their writing can be very effective and relevant for them. Older students could even choose some of their own spelling words by scanning their portfolio for words with which they have trouble.
- **Don't carry spelling instruction over into their free writing or drafting.** This may only disrupt the flow of their writing and put undo pressure on them at a time when they should be concentrating on ideas.
- **Teach students to spell high frequency words correctly.** As mentioned previously, the 100 most common words make up about 50 percent of the material we read. Thus, we can significantly improve our students' literacy skills if we teach them to read and spell these words automatically. So, how does one teach these sight words? In a word, practice. You simply have to arrange for students to have many, many encounters with these words, both directly (flashcards, word walls) and indirectly (reading).

One well-established list of these “sight words” from which teachers might work, is the “Fry list” that we discussed in Chapter Three. You may find it beneficial to peruse those lists now and return to them in your classroom so that you can teach them to your students along-side spelling words. To examine the list, see “Fry’s 300 Instant Sight Words” in the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 34-35) found online at the Resource Exchange on TFA.Net. ✖

Grammar and Mechanics

Research continues to suggest that teaching students to use correct grammar in spoken and written language improves their literacy skills substantially. While you may not be teaching your Kindergarteners the parts of speech, you are—as part of your strategies to enhance students’ print awareness—modeling, teaching and reinforcing lessons

One book that was particularly engaging for my students was Punctuation Takes a Vacation. Our class was learning about punctuation in Communication Arts. All of my students also had punctuation as an IEP goal. After conducting a thorough, interactive read aloud (on three occasions), and creating several independent learning stations based on the material in the book, all of my students mastered punctuation. They met their IEP goals within a fraction of the time allotted.

Allyson Jasper, St. Louis '03
Manager, Corporate Relations,
American Academy of Family Physicians

Letter Formation and Handwriting

Most literacy specialists recommend that lower elementary students have formal letter formation instruction as part of their daily routine, even if it is a relatively short exercise. Students, especially very young students, need the opportunity to think about their writing free of concern for content in order to focus attention on improving handwriting skills. Most curricula will have a particular method of teaching letter formation and handwriting.

about capitalization, punctuation, and other fundamental mechanics of the writing process. Younger students need to be taught when and how to leave space between sentences, for example. Older students need practice with more complicated mechanics such as paragraph structure. As students mature and develop the capacity to think about the various parts of speech in their writing, the mechanics lessons can become more complex. While it would certainly be unwise to completely divorce these mechanics lessons from the real writing that students are doing, most teachers find that regular “mini-lessons” on subjects such as capitalization, punctuation, or subject-verb agreement are an important means of learning the basic conventions of

writing. Teachers will often connect a given mini-lesson to a subsequent writing project to allow students

to focus on the mechanics or grammar point in their writing. To plan your grammar and language mechanics instruction, consider the following grade-level benchmarks, from the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning:¹⁶⁴

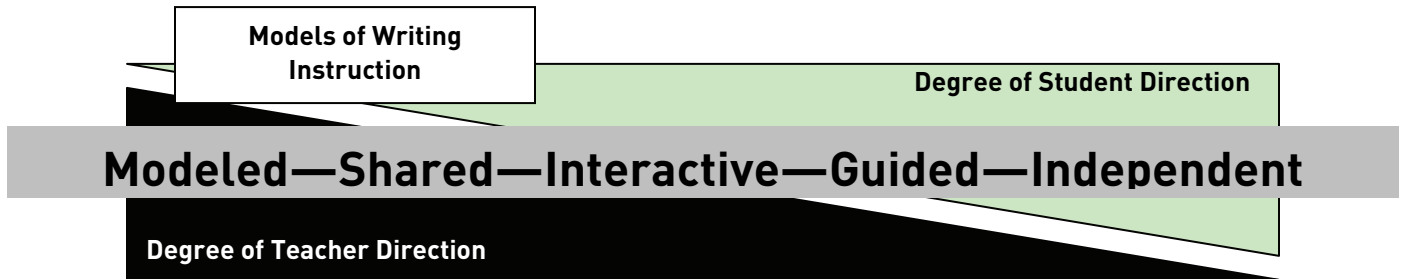
Level I (Kindergarten-Second Grades) Language Arts Benchmarks	Level II (Third-Fifth Grades) Language Arts Benchmarks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses conventions of print in writing (e.g., forms letters in print, uses upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet; spaces words and sentences; writes from left-to-write and top-to-bottom; includes margins) • Uses complete sentences in written compositions • Uses nouns in written compositions (e.g., nouns for simple objects, family members, community workers, and categories) • Uses verbs in written compositions (e.g., verbs for a variety of situations, action words) • Uses adjectives in written compositions (i.e., uses descriptive words) • Uses adverbs in written compositions (e.g., uses words that answer how, when, where, and why questions) • Uses conventions of capitalization in written compositions (e.g., first and last names, first word of a sentence) • Uses conventions of punctuation in written compositions (e.g., uses periods after declarative sentences, question marks after interrogative sentences, uses commas in a series of words) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writes in cursive • Uses pronouns in written compositions (e.g., substitutes pronouns for nouns, uses pronoun agreement) • Uses nouns in written compositions (e.g., uses plural and singular forms of naming nouns, forms regular and irregular plural nouns, uses common and proper nouns, uses nouns as subjects) • Uses verbs in written compositions (e.g., uses a wide variety of action verbs, past and present verb tenses, forms of regular verbs, verbs that agree with the subject) • Uses adjectives in written compositions (i.e., indefinite, numerical, predicate adjectives) • Uses adverbs in written compositions (e.g., to make comparisons) • Uses coordinating conjunctions in written compositions (e.g., links ideas using connecting ideas) • Uses negatives in written compositions (e.g., avoids double negatives) • Uses conventions of capitalization in written compositions (e.g., titles of people; proper nouns [names of towns, cities, counties, and states; days of the week; months of the year; names of streets; names of countries, holidays]; first word of direct quotations; heading, salutation, and closing of a letter) • Uses conventions of punctuation in written compositions (e.g., uses periods after imperative sentences and in initials, abbreviations, and titles before names; uses commas in dates and addresses and after greetings and closings in a letter; uses apostrophes in contractions and possessive nouns; uses quotation marks around titles and with direct quotations; uses a colon between hour and minute)

II. Instructional Contexts Along a Continuum of Teacher Directedness

Spelling, grammar, and mechanics make up the building blocks of writing, much the same way phonemes, graphemes, and morphemes are the building blocks of reading, and dribbling, passing, and shooting are the building blocks of playing basketball. So when it comes time for students to put those building block skills to work in an actual “game” situation, you will move students through a continuum of instructional contexts that can be classified according to a gradual shift from teacher-driven writing to student-driven writing. Keeping in mind that (1) independent writing is the ultimate goal and (2) the path along this line for a class of students is anything but linear (as a teacher might use all of the methods in any given day), consider the following graphic representation of this continuum:

¹⁶⁴ <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/standardDetails.asp?subjectID=7&standardID=3>, accessed 7/10/2010.

Methods of Writing Instruction



We will consider each of these five methods in turn.

Modeled Writing—teacher creates, writes, and thinks aloud

Under the modeled writing method, the most teacher-directed approach, the teacher writes in front of the students, creating the text, and controlling the pen. Even more importantly, the teacher constantly “thinks aloud” about writing strategies and skills.

This approach allows students to hear the thinking that accompanies the process of writing. Those thoughts may address choosing a topic, organizing your ideas, using a plan to write your rough draft, removing repetitive information, or proofreading to fix grammar or spelling mistakes, to name just a few. For beginning writers who are just developing familiarity with basic book and print awareness, the modeling teacher might think aloud in the following way:

Let’s see. First, I have to figure out where to start. Do I write from the top going down or from the bottom going up? I know that I write from the top going down. Now, do I write from left to right [as teacher makes motion across chalkboard from left to right], or do I write from right to left? [analogous motion] I know that when I read books, like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* that we read this morning, I read from this side to this side, so I am going to write from left to right as well . . .

For slightly older students, the thinking aloud might sound more like:

OK. I’ve written in my notebook about the special Wednesday night dinners that my dad and I had when I was little—our dinner dates. My ideas are really good but they don’t sound like a story yet. I need to make a plan to help me write a story that other people will enjoy reading. Hmm... Oh! Now I’m remembering how we read one of Jerdine Nolen’s stories from *In My Momma’s Kitchen*. I’m thinking that one thing she did to make us really love her story was to have everything that happened build up to one really funny moment. Remember how we all laughed when Daddy sang ‘La Cucaracha’ as his corn pudding cooked? We called that the ‘hot spot’ in her story, and everything else led us to that point—the funniest part of all! I think that when I make the plan for my story, I’m going to tell what happened during our dinner dates and then, at the very end, I’ll share the best moment of all. My hot spot needs to be something really funny that happened during one of the dinners, something that will make you all laugh when you read it. Oh, I see some of you are remembering something funny from my writer’s notebook, and it looks like you have suggestions for what my hot spot should be... Good idea, guys! I think I’ll write my story so that all of the events lead up to my dad spilling spaghetti all over his tie and the waiter bringing him a bib! That’s a perfect hot spot.

Thus, by talking aloud about your literacy objectives as you complete the writing, you build your students' skills, habits, and understanding of a writer's thought process. As the "modeling teacher," your role in this approach as you think aloud is to:

- Use expressive language and actions to model critical writing-process concepts
- Think aloud about actions and choices in writing
- Show students the metacognitive strategies involved in reading and writing
- Use modeled writing as a mini-lesson to introduce new writing skills and genres
- Demonstrate the importance of composing a meaningful, coherent message for a particular audience and a specific purpose
- Demonstrate the correct use of print conventions such as capitalization, punctuation, and print directionality
- Demonstrate spelling strategies
- Connect spelling to phonics lessons
- Demonstrate re-reading as a process to help students to remember what they are writing about

During Modeled Writing, students are listening and watching, with the explicit expectation that they will be using these strategies on their own at some point soon. Although a standard Modeled Writing lesson will not last more than 15 minutes, this approach is appropriate for any type of grouping strategy, including whole class instruction. Many teachers use Modeled Writing exercises each time they introduce a new writing skill or genre and then transition to the more student-involved approaches explained below.

Shared Writing—teacher and students co-create; teacher writes and thinks aloud

Shared writing also has the teacher control the pen, but invites the teacher and the students to create the ideas for the text together. That is, the students and teacher plan out the writing and then the teacher actually scripts the words. Like in Modeled Writing, it is important that the teacher engage the students by thinking aloud about the processes that are happening as he or she writes. And, of course, the teacher may involve students in other ways as well, such as asking them to spell certain words or to decide when a new paragraph should begin.

This approach effectively reinforces the concepts of print, as the students' thoughts are transformed to written language as they watch. In addition to the process-related issues about which teachers might think aloud during modeled writing, the teacher in a shared writing session may think aloud and talk to the students more about the content of the writing. Thus, the role of the teacher in Shared Writing is to:

- Introduce the lesson or topic by modeling how to begin writing
- Plan the text and help students generate ideas for writing
- Record students' ideas
- Reinforce print conventions such as capitalization, punctuation, and print directionality

The student, meanwhile, is contributing ideas to the writing and will read and reread the composition with the teacher. This strategy is also useful for whole group or small group instruction.

Interactive Writing—teacher and students co-create and co-write

For Kindergarten and first grade students, one of the most educationally fruitful learning models is interactive writing. This approach brings the students into the writing process to create products that are well beyond the level of anything they could create on their own. The teacher and students share the pen (or chalk or marker) to do the writing. The teacher plays an active role in monitoring and guiding the process, talking students through various writing conventions that the group encounters while they write.

Methods of Writing Instruction

The purposes of this approach are many. By having a two-way conversation around the creation of words, sentences, or paragraphs, teachers can negotiate the content of the text, construct words through the analysis of sound, and develop concepts of letter, word, and punctuation. Moreover, teachers are able to lead students to increase and reinforce letter knowledge, and gain familiarity with some frequently encountered words.

Consider the following play-by-play account of an interactive writing activity in a Kindergarten class:

Interactive Writing in Action

The following is a play-by-play description of an Interactive Writing session in the Kindergarten class of Heather Thompson (Rio Grande Valley '97) on January 29, 2003. This process took about 8 minutes.

We come back from the park and sit down to write in our class park journal. First, we reread our entries from previous days. Then, I ask students to think about something they saw or did at the park today. Several hands shoot up.

Ricky: We saw two dogs!

Vidal: A little dog and a big dog.

Tyler: There was two little dogs.

(An argument ensues about how many dogs there were. Finally it is decided that there were three.)

Teacher: OK, so we're going to write, wait, let me write the date first. [Writes and reads, "January 29, 2003."] OK, we're going to write, "We saw three dogs." How many words is that?

We...saw...three...dogs. [Teacher puts a dot on the paper to indicate each word.]

Evelyn: Four words.

Teacher: What do we need to put to start the word "we"?

(Various students chime in with the /w/ sound, some also say the name of the letter.)

Teacher: That's right! Christina, would you like to come write a capital "w" to start our sentence?

(The teacher similarly elicits the second sound of "we" from the students, and then discusses leaving a space between the words. Albert comes up to write the first sound of "saw" and writes the "s" backwards.)

Teacher: Oops.

Several students: Backwards!

Teacher: That's OK. Let's cover it up with correction tape and try again.

Albert: How, like this? (Writes s in the air, then on the paper.)

Teacher: Now, the sounds in the rest of the word "saw" are hard, but where could we look to find it?

Jenifer: Look on the other paper.

(Teacher and students look at the previous journal to find the word "saw," then the teacher demonstrates copying the rest of the word. The teacher then calls another student to write the number 3, and assists the students in stretching out the word "dogs" to hear and write the letters for all four sounds.)

Teacher: Are we finished?

Class: Yes!

Teacher: So, what do we need at the end?

Class: A period!

Teacher: Vanessa, would you like to put the period and draw the three dogs for us so we can remember what we wrote? Then we will read it one more time.

As you can see from the above description, in the interactive writing model, the teacher's role is to:

- Introduce the lesson by modeling how to begin writing
- Plan the text and help students generate ideas for writing
- Record students' ideas, reinforcing print conventions such as capitalization, punctuation, and print directionality
- Reinforce students' phonemic awareness through writing
- Make connections of unknown to known words, such as students' names
- Ask students to participate in the writing at strategic points by asking individuals to write known letters, words, pieces of punctuation, or phrases
- Move your students to independence by requiring them to accept more and more responsibility in this process
- Involve your students in repeatedly reading the products they have created during interactive writing sessions

As the students provide writing ideas in something like an apprentice role, they are actively engaging in the writing process, contributing known letters or words at the frontier of their knowledge. The teacher should be sure to read and reread the ultimate composition, reviewing the skills that have been highlighted in that process.

As you might imagine, this method is useful for whole class, small group, and individual instruction. Many Kindergarten and first grade teachers make interactive writing a part of their daily routine.

To summarize, the keys to effective interactive, shared, and modeled writing are that the teacher:

- Demonstrate the writing in a way that is large enough that all students in the class or small group can access it and be involved
- Think aloud constantly about what is being written
- Remind students to use the skills and strategies that you model when they write independently
- Involve ALL students (There is a risk with this model that one student will be participating while all others are off task.)

Guided Writing—students create and write in small groups while the teacher guides the process

In Guided Writing, the teacher works with the whole class or a small group of students who have similar needs and coaches them as they write a composition. Here, the students take on the actual drafting responsibilities as the teacher presents a structured lesson that guides the students through the writing process. The teacher closely supervises the students, an element that makes this model most appropriate for small groups. Guided writing gives each student the opportunity to produce his or her own writing, with a bit of teacher support. This approach is often used to teach a specific writing procedure, strategy, or skill.

Methods of Writing Instruction

In this approach, the role of the teacher is to:

- Observe and assess students' writing
- Meet with individuals or small groups who have similar needs
- Actively prompt, coach, and guide individual students' writing skills
- Respond as a reader
- Ask open-ended questions
- Extend students' thinking in the process of composing
- Foster writing independence

Independent Writing—students create and write while the teacher confers and monitors progress

The student is in charge of the drafting under an independent writing model. Students use the writing process to write sentences, paragraphs, stories, or essays. The teacher monitors students' progress and intervenes appropriately. This model can be implemented in any number of ways, including writing centers, writing workshops, journal writing, and letter writing.

Do not misinterpret the name of this approach as implying that the teacher is not involved. The teacher continues to be involved—by creating opportunities to engage in authentic, purposeful writing, by responding to the content of students' writing, and by assisting students with the revision and editing process. The student's role does grow under this model, as he or she takes a larger ownership of both the process and the product. The student might select topics and content, or even genre in some cases. Eventually, the student should be responsible for his or her own revision and editing, as well.

Review of Part II

Method	Summary	Tips and Suggestions
Modeled Writing	Teacher creates, writes, and thinks aloud.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think aloud constantly, explaining the strategies you use. • Use expressive language and actions to describe exactly what you're doing. • Use modeled writing as a mini-lesson to introduce new writing skills and genres.
Shared Writing	Teacher and students co-create; teacher writes and thinks aloud.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have your students watch as you transform their thoughts into written words. • Contribute ideas to the writing, but help students generate ideas themselves.
Interactive Writing	Teacher and students co-create and co-write.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk, think aloud, and involve your students while one or more write. • Have a two-way conversation around the creation of words, sentences, or paragraphs. • Move your students to independence by not doing what they can do for themselves. • Demonstrate the writing in a way that is large enough that all students in the class can access it and be involved.
Guided Writing	Students create and write while teacher closely monitors and guides process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the whole class or a small group of students who have similar needs as they write a composition. • Observe and assess your students' writing, actively coaching their skills. • Ask open-ended questions to extend your students' thinking in the process.
Independent Writing	Students create and write while teacher monitors progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intervene with the writing process only when appropriate. • Continue to be involved, but let the students' role grow. • Respond to the content of your students' writing. • Assist students with the revision and editing process.

III. The Writing Process: Pre-Writing, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing

The final way that we can think about the task of writing instruction is by considering how you might approach instructing students to create a particular written product. The most effective approach to writing any particular text, be it a paragraph, letter, essay, short story, or research project, requires the writer to break the process into five steps:

- (1) Pre-writing**
- (2) Drafting**
- (3) Revising**
- (4) Proofreading and Editing**
- (5) Publishing and Presentation**

As a strong literacy instructor, you will be teaching students both how to implement strategies for each of these steps, and the sequence of these steps themselves. That is, you want your students to associate the concept of writing with this complete process. It should be second nature to your students that there is a meaningful pre-writing stage of any writing project, and that there is a crucial revising stage to any writing project. At the same time, your students should have command of a range of strategies to use within each stage of the process. In this section, we will consider various strategies that you will teach your students to help them at each stage of the writing process.

At the beginning of the year, I read Amelia's Notebook (a story of a young girl who keeps her own journal) as a way of motivating my students to write. They then decorate their own notebooks that they will use all year. Inside these notebooks we complete our pre-writing steps for each project (our lists of seed ideas, quick writes, wonderings, etc.). We also have writing folders that hold work from each stage of the process (drafts, revisions, and final drafts) for each individual project.

Shannen Coleman, Baltimore '03
Academic Director, Child First Authority/BUILD

Note that our focus in this chapter will be on writing both as a *process* and a *product*. Traditionally, classroom writing instruction has focused on writing products (sentences, paragraphs, essays, research papers, etc.), with little regard for process. For example, students might be expected to write an essay based only on their review of models of an essay. In the last two decades, however, we have seen significant changes in the way schools approach writing instruction. The most effective approach involves more attention to instructional activities that lead students to think through and organize their thoughts before writing and to re-think and revise their initial drafts.¹⁶⁵ So, while today we still emphasize the importance of the final product, we recognize that we must also focus on the process itself, expressly teaching students the steps that go into writing. These trends have led to our focus on the five-step writing process of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing.

Pre-Writing

Pre-writing is arguably the most consequential step in the writing process, and it's importance is often overlooked by teachers and students. Many elementary students think that "writing" a story or paper means sitting down and creating something that will not be altered. While it takes somewhat different forms depending on grade and developmental levels, pre-writing is both a discovery stage, when content and ideas are being collected and organized, and a rehearsal stage, when writers are mentally, verbally, and on paper "trying out" different topics about which they might write. Among the many forms that pre-writing can take are:

¹⁶⁵ Smith, Carl. "Writing Instruction: Changing Views over the Years," ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication Digest, #155.

Methods of Writing Instruction

- **Generating Words and Ideas Exercises.** Motivate students to start thinking about words and the subject that will be written about, such as:
 - Brainstorming
 - Listing
 - Observing/taking notes
 - Reading and conducting research/taking notes
 - Free writing
 - Sentence frames (My favorite place is...)
- **Organization.** All students need to be taught how to organize their ideas before they write a first draft. Graphic organizers and outlines are excellent tools for pre-writing, as they force students to think about connections and relationships between ideas. You can teach students to create a plan before they write, either by using a teacher-created organizer or a student-created outline. For some examples of graphic organizers, see the *Instructional Planning & Delivery* text.
- **Previewing Grammar and Mechanics.** Previewing a specific grammar skill that you want students to use in their writing will give them an immediate understanding of your expectations, as well as the necessary time to practice the skill in isolation. For example, if your students are about to write a narrative with dialogue, you could take that opportunity to teach a mini-lesson on the use of quotation marks.
- **Teaching Characteristics of Particular Forms/Genres.** A critical stage in the pre-writing process is instruction in the genre of writing students will be producing. As you can imagine, you cannot expect students to write a persuasive letter, a personal narrative, or an expository article with any success if they do not know the characteristics of a piece of writing in that genre and have not read or examined exemplary models. Just as when you are teaching any other skill, when teaching the skill of writing in a particular genre, explain the characteristics of the genre, look at several exemplary models to identify those characteristics, model the creation of a piece in the genre, and then have students apply the characteristics of the genre as they draft their own piece.

KWL Chart

A useful tool to help students pre-write an informational piece is the “KWL Plus Chart.” As you know from our previous discussions of this model, “KWL” stands for “know, want to know, learn.” Before beginning a project, students can record what they know about the topic and what they want to know. As they research, they write what they’ve learned. The “plus” feature allows students to sort all that they know about the topic into categories. Though students need a different structure (an outline, perhaps) to help them organize this information, KWL charts help them take notes as they research. For a sample KWL chart, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 52) found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✕

For an example of student work in the pre-writing stage, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 53-54: “Sample Student Work: Pre-Writing”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✕

Drafting

Once students know the characteristics of the genre and have collected and organized their ideas, they are ready to work in the second stage of writing. Drafting refers to the time when the student is actually crafting language and translating an outline or plan into a more coherent piece. Part of your role as a teacher of literacy will be to disabuse your students of the idea that drafting *is* writing. Rather, drafting is one step in the writing process. The first draft is usually done relatively quickly to get ideas on paper. In fact, research indicates that writers who try to make the first draft “perfect” run the risk of missing opportunities to discover ideas that could be surfacing during the drafting process.¹⁶⁶

Young writers need quiet and focused atmospheres that will be conducive to drafting. Create routines that get all distractions (sharpening pencils, gathering materials, etc.) out of the way before writing time begins. Many teachers, for example, use a routine called Writers’ Workshop when students are working in the stages of the writing process and the teacher is having writing conferences with individual students about their progress. For an example of student work in the drafting stage, see “Sample Student Work: Drafting” in the online **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 55-56). ✖

Revising

Revising refers to those substantive changes that are made after the rough draft. Primarily, this stage considers the effectiveness of a piece, both in terms of content and language. Revision does not focus on mechanics, a task that makes up the editing and proofreading stage. To help young students understand the difference, you might explain that writers focus on how their piece *sounds* during the revising stage and how it *looks* during editing. While this description is not perfect, it is often a helpful distinction for beginning writers.

Possible foci during the revision stage of writing are the ideas and content, the organization and “flow,” and the language choices made in the piece. Of course, the extent to which students revise a written piece depends partially on their developmental level. For example, while you might teach first graders simply to delete ideas that are off topic, you will probably expect upper elementary students to revise more extensively, perhaps by adding descriptive language, clarifying sections that are unclear, including transition words and sentences, or changing the order in which ideas are presented.

How Do I Choose (and Help Students Choose) Topics for Writing?

One of your goals is to help students learn to write for a variety of purposes and in a variety of forms. For example, students can write personal narratives, short stories, poetry, persuasive letters or essays, step-by-step directions, or informational pamphlets and reports. When you are choosing topics for students to write about, consider the following guidelines:

- Start with topics that are familiar and manageable for the students you are teaching. First graders will be able to write step-by-step directions for cooking a Thanksgiving turkey (though they may be less than accurate!) but will not have the requisite knowledge and skills to write an expository essay explaining the origins of common holiday traditions.
- Teach students to *write* the types of genres that they are *reading*. Kindergarteners who are reading and listening to classroom rules can “write” and illustrate rules for the cafeteria. Third graders engaged in a study of nonfiction can write an expository article for a class magazine (perhaps relating to a science unit). Fifth graders who are reading and listening to memoirs can create personal narratives.
- Provide opportunities for choice, in order to build ownership and motivate students. If you have decided that your third graders will create a magazine that gives other students information about Earth/Space science, allow them to choose a topic on which to write their particular article (erosion, fossils, or continental and oceanic features).

¹⁶⁶ Botel, M. and Susan Lytle. *Pennsylvania Comprehensive Reading/Communication Arts Plan II*. Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Department of Education – Communications Division, 1998.

Methods of Writing Instruction

Elementary students find revising to be a particularly challenging step in the writing process. As with instruction in all stages, you should deliver a whole-group mini-lesson on a revision topic, and then model revising your own piece for your students. You might consider one of the following sample topics, depending on the skills that your students need to develop:

- **Varying sentence structure**
- **Elaborating on ideas**
- **Creating strong topic sentences**
- **Consistency of voice, character, or style**
- **Organization of ideas**
- **Improving introductions/story beginnings**
- **Adding sensory details**
- **Including time and transition words**
- **Using dialogue**
- **Choosing strong action verbs**
- **Crafting conclusions/story endings**

When students have a conference with me during the revising and editing stages, it's sort of a "DMV" system: a student takes a clothespin with a number on it and goes back to his or her desk to continue working on his or her story, or he or she can start a new story. I call a number, and whoever has that number gets to come to the back table with their story, and I can help him or her revise and edit it. This really cuts down on congestion around my table!

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Kindergarten Teacher,
Prospect Hills Academy Charter School

Additionally, students need varying amounts of feedback from you and their peers as they attempt to revise their first drafts. Teachers of Kindergarten through third graders, as well as fourth and fifth teachers whose students are just beginning to use the writing process, need to provide a good deal of structure during the revision process. One way that you might provide structure is by literally "cutting and pasting" students' first drafts (mimicking the word processing function on a computer), opening up space for students to add details or helping them to rearrange the order in which they express their ideas.

Proofreading and Editing

During the proofreading and editing phase, the student-author does the nitty-gritty check on the mechanics of the writing, watching carefully for details such as punctuation, spelling, and grammar. These editing skills must be taught to even our youngest students. Children should leave your room not only commanding age-appropriate proofreading and editing skills, but believing that this stage is an integral part of writing that cannot be skipped.

Teaching this part of the writing process can be accomplished through presenting mini-lessons on capitalization, punctuation, etc. and through providing a checklist of language mechanics expectations for the text. It is also taught through teachers' modeling during modeled writing, shared writing, or interactive

Checklists are an excellent way of making your expectations clear and helping your students revise and edit their work. I make a checklist for each writing piece that we complete, and give it to the students during the revision part of the process. As they revise and edit, they can refer back to what I am looking for (which I've taught in mini-lessons). When I grade the assignment, I fill in the checklist and calculate the grade based on how many checks the child receives).

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writing. See "Age-Appropriate Proofreading Checklists" in the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 57) found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. A table of "Proofreading Marks" that shows the grades in which various proofreading marks are first used is also provided in the Toolkit (p. 58). ✖

Publication and Presentation

This stage brings closure to the writing process by allowing students to share their best work with others, whether that sharing takes the form of a book that is sold at local bookstores or an oral presentation about a written project to the class. Many teachers report

that the possibility of publication, in its many forms, has a significant impact on a students' motivation to write and also focuses students' energy on revising and editing.

There are obviously many ways to publish students' writing. To spark your own thoughts, consider the following methods:

- read writing aloud
- submit to a contest
- create a class anthology
- record on a cassette tape
- send it to a pen pal
- submit it to a magazine
- read it at an assembly
- share in a reading party
- share with family
- hold an "author's tea"
- display on bulletin board
- make a hard-bound book
- make a big book
- share with younger students

The **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (available online at the Resource Exchange on TFA.Net) contains directions for making bound books (p. 59: "Binding Books for the Classroom") and also an example of student work in the publishing stage (pp. 60-63: "Sample Student Work: Publishing"). ✖

Review of Part III

Thus, when we think carefully about the writing process itself—pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—we uncover a whole menu of activities and strategies that will help us improve our students' literacy skills. During pre-writing, for example, we can teach vocabulary and organizational techniques. During the editing process, we can focus students' attention on particular grammar skills. Combined with the various contexts for teaching writing that span the continuum of teacher-directedness, these strategies create powerful tools for literacy instruction.

Stage	Review	Tips and Suggestions
Pre-Writing	Teacher leads children to generate and organize content and ideas before beginning to write.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to free write in a notebook to spur ideas. • Teach students to read and take notes. • Enable students to organize ideas through the use of graphic organizers. • Use exemplary models to teach characteristics of the genre. • Preview a grammar skill to make students comfortable with using it in their writing.
Drafting	Student crafts the language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach your students that drafting is not writing, just one step of the writing process. • Provide a quiet and focused atmosphere with set routines and procedures.
Revising	Student (often with teacher's guidance) makes substantive changes to draft, including fixing content and style.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note: this step does not focus on mechanics; that will be addressed in the next stage. • Encourage students to improve their word choice, change the organization of ideas, or ensure sufficient evidence is provided to support a claim.
Proofreading and Editing	Student checks the mechanics of the writing, watching carefully for punctuation, spelling and other mechanics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach these editing skills, even to very young children. • Present mini-lessons on capitalization, punctuation, etc. • Provide a checklist of language mechanics expectations to your students during this stage.
Publishing and Presentation	Allow students to share their best work with others in various ways.	<p>A few ways to "publish" your students' writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the writing aloud. • Invite others to hear student-authors read their published work. • Submit the piece to a contest or magazine. • Make a book.

Methods of Writing Instruction

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on methods of writing instruction:

- In Part I, we considered some of the basic building blocks of writing that we know form a critically important foundation for literacy development.
- In Part II, we considered the various teacher- and student-centered modes of writing, including techniques such as Shared Writing and Interactive Writing.
- Finally, in Part III, we considered the various stages of the writing process that students use to create their own written products. As you read, each stage of the writing process—pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—offers a range of educational opportunities for teachers and students.

Structuring Your Literacy Classroom: A Balanced Literacy Block (K to 5)

Chapter Eight

- I. Read Aloud
- II. Shared Reading
- III. Guided Reading
- IV. Independent Reading
- V. Word Study
- VI. Writing

The previous chapters of this text examined each component of balanced literacy instruction in depth. This chapter is intended to bring all of those components together, providing you with a context for understanding how to structure your literacy classroom so that each instructional moment propels your students forward as readers and writers. All that we have learned about literacy instruction—from the grade level standards and assessment tools discussed in chapter two to the research-based instructional methods explored in chapters four through seven—culminates in a real classroom with real students. Our hope is that you will be able to synthesize all that you have learned in this text as you prepare to become an exemplary literacy teacher.

To that end, this chapter is about the implementation of effective, research-based strategies and activities during the instructional day. In districts across the country, teachers are weaving instruction in each component of literacy throughout an uninterrupted block of time—the balanced literacy block. Though the time allotted for the block and its components varies by grade-level, school, and district, it is common for elementary teachers to devote two to three hours each day to literacy instruction. The individual parts of the balanced literacy block include:

- **Read Aloud**
- **Shared Reading**
- **Guided Reading**
- **Independent Reading**
- **Word Study**
- **Writing**

Every day throughout the year, teachers read to students during the **Read Aloud**, read with students during **Shared Reading** and **Guided Reading**, and listen to and assess students' reading during **Independent Reading**. During the **Word Study** portion of the balanced literacy block, teachers provide explicit and systematic instruction in the building blocks of literacy—book and print awareness, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and the alphabetic principle, and word and structural analysis. Finally, teachers plan their **writing** instruction so that they model excellent writing for students, share the pen with students during Shared and Interactive Writing, and conference with students as they write independently.

Most likely, your school or district will provide guidance on how to structure your literacy block. Consider two schedules that an exemplary second grade and fourth grade teacher follow to ensure that their students receive instruction and practice in all the components of literacy.

A Balanced Literacy Block

Ms. Cleary's Second Grade Literacy Block	Mr. Moreno's Fourth Grade Literacy Block
<p>8:20-8:30 Morning Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief shared writing activity; student of the day shares the news, teacher scripts message Daily goal setting and class pledge 	<p>8:20-8:30 Do Now and Community Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do Now (correcting sentences for grammar, language mechanics, and spelling) Daily goal setting/problem solving
<p>8:30-8:55 Read Aloud</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will improve reading comprehension by making inferences about characters in <i>Julius, Baby of the World</i> by Kevin Henkes 	<p>8:30-8:55 Read Aloud</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read chapter of <i>The Watsons Go To Birmingham</i> by Christopher Paul Curtis; continue to model using a two-column journal entry to record a short passage of text on the left, and the thoughts or questions that the passage sparked on the right
<p>8:55-9:35 Shared Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will improve reading comprehension by making predictions about <i>The Tortoise and the Hare</i> Students will build fluency through echo reading 	<p>8:55-9:45 Shared Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preview vocabulary (through word web) in next chapter of <i>The Gold Cadillac</i> by Mildred Taylor; whole class discussion of what has happened so far in the novel, think-pair-share predictions (with explanations) for upcoming chapter Read next chapter (teacher reads first page aloud while students track; students read next two pages with a partner and then finish the chapter independently) Remind students to discuss the passage with their partner and use their two-column journal entry to record thoughts and questions After reading, place one passage on the overhead and lead class discussion on what thoughts or questions it sparked; students journal to record ideas
<p>9:35-10:05 Guided Reading/Literacy Centers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small group differentiated instruction; Octavia, Joshua, Barry, Tia will be able to summarize portions of a book (summary sentences on sticky notes) Other students working independently at the listening center (students with fluency needs), word sorting center (students who need more practice with <i>vowel consonant e</i> pattern), word work center (students quiz each other on word wall words/decodable words and read decodable books), reading response center (students from previous day's guided reading group work to reread the book and write in their journals about it), and buddy reading (students doing repeated reading to build fluency) 	<p>9:45-10:15 Guided Reading/Independent Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with two groups, one to receive additional instruction in long vowel spelling patterns, the other to build fluency through a phrasing lesson Other students reading independent leveled books and responding in a two-column journal entry as needed (Clayton, Shawnice and Troy read along with independent-level book on tape to work on fluency)
<p>10:05-10:25 Independent Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student read books on their independent reading level Conferences/assessments with Nikya, Daquaz, and Juan 	<p>10:15-10:40 Word Study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target morphemic patterns: <i>-tion, -tient, -tience</i> Blending, sorting, and dictation activities

Ms. Cleary's Second Grade Literacy Block	Mr. Moreno's Fourth Grade Literacy Block
10:25-10:55 Word Study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target spelling pattern: the // sound spelled <i>ai_</i> and <i>_ay</i> • Blending, sorting, and dictation activities 	11:40-11:40 Writer's Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students work to revise their memoirs by adding supporting details to demonstrate their <i>courage</i>, <i>pride</i>, or <i>persistence</i>. • Discuss what details Lois Lowry gave us to identify character traits in her characters
11:00-11:30 Lunch	11:40-12:10 Lunch
11:30-12:10 Writer's Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin persuasive unit: pre-writing by reading <i>A Fine, Fine School</i> and discussing the genre of persuasion; students describe the purpose of persuasion in notebooks 	

As you can see, both the second and fourth grade literacy blocks are broken into similar parts (Read Aloud, Shared Reading, etc.), but the **time** allotted for decoding and comprehension differs. While second graders in Ms. Cleary's classroom spend a half hour in Word Study, Mr. Moreno's fourth graders devote slightly less time to that part of the block. Further, Mr. Moreno's students devote significantly more time over the course of the morning to comprehension activities. Another difference between these two classrooms is the **emphasis** given to certain literacy skills. A quick glance at their schedules tells us that both teachers use a research-based scope and sequence. While Ms. Cleary's students study spelling patterns for the long /ā/ sound (as is developmentally appropriate for early second grade), Mr. Moreno leads his class in a study of complex word endings (though it's important to note that Mr. Moreno differentiates to meet individual needs by offering small group instruction in the long vowel spelling patterns for his students who haven't mastered this skill).

Finally, we see that the **context** in which students learn and practice comprehension strategies differs. In second grade, Ms. Cleary's students build their comprehension during the Read Aloud and in Shared Reading. During these times, students are listening to a book read to them or are supported by the voices of other fluent readers; thus, their cognitive energy is freed to think strategically about the texts. In fourth grade, however, students are able to use comprehension strategies during Independent Reading; for most students, decoding has become an automatic process. The fourth graders with weak decoding skills (Clayton, Shawnice, and Troy) listen to a book on tape during this time to improve their reading fluency and also attend Mr. Moreno's small group for additional instruction in troublesome spelling patterns.

In the next part of this chapter, we will zoom in significantly to examine each part of the balanced literacy block, considering its purpose(s) and describing what excellent literacy teachers consider as they plan and instruct. Additionally, we will peer into Ms. Cleary's second grade classroom to get a snapshot of each part of the block in action.

A Balanced Literacy Block

I. Read Aloud

During the Read Aloud, the teacher reads a book, poem, or article to the entire class. Many of us have warm memories of our elementary teachers reading aloud to us during “story time,” perhaps as he or she sat in a rocking chair and we sat with our classmates on the rug. Read Aloud is the most teacher-directed part of the literacy block, and it is crucial to the literacy development of students throughout elementary (and even middle) school because it develops their ability to use comprehension strategies to think about a text.

An effective Read Aloud has several instructional purposes, with some variance by grade level. These purposes include:

- To build **book and print awareness** in Kindergarten by modeling reading behaviors, such as handling a book and reading from top to bottom and left to right
- To develop **phonological and phonemic awareness** in Kindergarten and first grade by choosing some books with rhyming or predictable patterns
- To model **reading accuracy and fluency** for all students by giving them the opportunity to hear the teacher read quickly, expressively, and with ease
- To develop all students’ **listening and reading comprehension skills** by asking questions and leading discussions about books before, during, and after reading and by exposing students to sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structure

Teachers who lead effective and purposeful Read Aloud plan and execute them with the following in mind:

- **Choice of text is crucial.** Books that you read with students must be developmentally appropriate and representative of a wide variety of genres. As Jim Trelease notes in *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, students throughout elementary school should listen to both picture books and chapter books. While our Kindergarteners primarily listen to nursery rhymes, predictable texts, and picture books, our first through fifth grade students enjoy and benefit from a healthy mix of picture books and more complex novels. Choose Read Aloud books that build students’ knowledge about a theme or content area, or to model a particular comprehension strategy. For some suggestions of excellent books for Read Aloud, see the “Lists of Books for Read Aloud” in the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 64-81) found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✕
- **Plan your Read Aloud as carefully as you plan any other lesson.** After you choose a book, you should read it carefully, choosing vocabulary words to explicitly teach and marking spots that are ripe for questions and for “thinking aloud” about reading comprehension strategies. Write down your questions on sticky notes, stick the notes in the book, and consider how you’ll ask questions to ensure that all students get a chance to think and share in some way. (While there is not time for every student to share his or her comment with the class, you can provide some opportunities for students to think with a partner or a small group.) Note what you will say as you model “thinking aloud” for students and make sure you are explicit with your students about the thought processes that you go through as you read.
- **Consider carefully when to stop and think during Read Aloud.** Pausing your reading to think and discuss is a balancing act. Stopping too often disrupts the flow of the book and interrupts comprehension. Not stopping enough limits the amount of critical thinking that students can do around the text. Be sure that you balance asking critical questions with leaving “open space” for students to think and to share their thoughts and questions with a partner or the whole class.

When students have learned effective reading strategies, they will often want to use them as you read to them; let them do so.

- **Plan ways for students to respond after Read Aloud.** Students are taking in new information as they listen to a Read Aloud. To fully process that information, they must respond in some way to what they have heard. Reading researchers recommend giving students an opportunity to respond after Read Aloud and asking them to do so in a variety of ways—orally (through discussion or a think-pair-share), visually (through drawing or imagining), physically (through a pantomime), or in written form (through journaling or responding to a prompt).¹⁶⁷ Not all of these methods need to be used for your Read Aloud to be successful, nor must the response time be lengthy. Sometimes one minute to think and share with a partner will suffice, and at other times, a five-minute journal entry is necessary.
- **Build routines** that create an atmosphere conducive to listening and thinking and that mark Read Aloud as a unique time in your classroom. Have a special chair to read from (a rocking chair or a bar stool often works well) and consider asking even upper-elementary students to sit in front of you on the carpet.

Classroom Snapshot: Read Aloud

As the classical music begins to play softly, twenty-one second graders tiptoe to the back rug and find their spots on the carpet, eager for Read Aloud to begin. From her rocking chair, Ms. Cleary asks Daquaz to turn off the overhead lights and turn on their reading lamp. When all twenty-one bodies are still, Ms. Cleary welcomes her students to Read Aloud and holds up the cover of the book that they will read. As soon as they recognize the familiar mouse characters from Kevin Henkes' books, a buzz fills the classroom. "Ooo... this looks like *Chrysanthemum* and *Sheila Rae, the Brave*," several students whisper. Ms. Cleary has chosen to begin this unit on characters by reading several Kevin Henkes' titles because she knows that he creates strong, dynamic characters with which young readers can identify. On this day, she plans to read *Julius, the Baby of the*

Ms. Cleary carefully chooses quality children's literature for the Read Aloud.

World, the story of Lilly, a mouse who is excited to have a new brother until the baby arrives and takes of all of her parents' attention. Out of jealousy, Lilly does everything in her power to reject her brother—until their older cousin begins insulting the baby.

Ms. Cleary and her students create a comfortable, familiar atmosphere during the Read Aloud.

"Whiz kids," says Ms. Cleary, "Today we are going to read and think about the characters in another Kevin Henkes book, *Julius, the Baby of the World*. You remember that main characters, like *Chrysanthemum* and *Sheila Rae*, are the stars of our stories, and that we can learn a lot about these characters by thinking about what they say and do. What made us think that *Sheila Rae* was a show-off?"

Tia raises her hand. "Cause *Sheila Rae* kept making fun of her little sister for being scared of stuff," she explained. "Very smart, Tia. Our class inferred that *Sheila Rae* was a show-off because of how she treated her sister. Did Kevin Henkes tell us in the book that she was a show-off? A chorus of *no's* erupts. No, we had to use our own background knowledge of how people act to understand why *Sheila Rae* was acting that way. Just as we did when we read about *Sheila Rae*, we are going to read *Julius, the Baby of the World* and make some inferences about what kind of mouse the main character is. Now let me give you a little

Ms. Cleary continues to reinforce comprehension strategies, such as inferring, that have been previously introduced.

¹⁶⁷ Rasinski, Timothy V. *The Fluent Reader: Oral Reading Strategies for Building Word Recognition, Fluency and Comprehension*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2003.

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preview of this book. Lilly has been the only mouse in her family for her whole life until the day that her mom and dad bring home a new little brother, Julius. Put your thumb up if you have little brothers and sisters.” Three-quarters of the thumbs in the class go up. “So I bet you’re going to make lots of inferences about why Lilly behaves as she does once the new baby arrives on the scene. Who can remind us what we’re going to think about as we read?” Barry responds, “We’re gonna infer about why Lilly acts the way she does. We have to put our own thinking together with what it says in the book.” Ms. Cleary smiles, pleased that her students are using the language of inferring that she has modeled, and says, “That’s right. Can someone remind me why we need to infer when we read?” Daquaz raises his hand and explains, “‘Cause most of the time the book doesn’t come out and tell us everything about what’s going on. We have to do our own thinking too.” Ms. Cleary nods and begins reading.

*Before Julius was born, Lilly was the best big sister in the world.
She gave him things. She told him secrets.
And she sang lullabies to him every night.
After Julius was born, it was a different story...
...“I am the queen,” said Lilly. “And I hate Julius.”¹⁶⁸*

Ms. Cleary models expressive, fluent reading.

When she gets to her sticky note, Ms. Cleary stops reading, puts the book on her lap, and says, “You know, this part of the story is really making me think. At the beginning of the story, Lilly seemed really happy and kind. But in this part, Lilly wrote a story called ‘Julius, the Germ of the World’ and that seems really mean. I wonder why she did that?” Ms. Cleary looks puzzled for a moment, and the class is quiet. “You know what I’m inferring right now? I’m thinking that Lilly is acting mean because she feels bad about having to share her mom and dad with Julius. I’m going to turn back and show you the pictures that helped me to think she doesn’t want to share...”

Ms. Cleary plans her Read Alouds thoughtfully, marking places to stop and noting specific questions to ask.

Ms. Cleary continues with her reading, stopping at her next sticky note to ask, “Why do you think Lilly drew this picture?” Ms. Cleary shows the page again, pointing to the picture Lilly drew of her family, and allows students to think for a moment. “Lilly drew a picture showing herself, her mom, and her dad and wrote the words ‘that’s all there is really.’ Was that really all of her family?” The students respond with a chorus of *no’s*. The class is quiet for a moment. Slowly, Octavia raises her hand. “I’m inferring that Lilly is wishing Julius had never come.” Ms. Cleary nods. “Hmm... what words or pictures made you think that?” Octavia asks Ms. Cleary to see the page again. “Right there where she left out Julius from her drawing! She’s making up that he’s not in her family!” Octavia exclaims. Ms. Cleary responds, “I think you’re right. Can anyone else think of a big word that we could use to describe Lilly? What word means how you feel when you *really* want something that someone else has—like all of your mom or dad’s attention—and you can’t have it?” Within seconds, hands are waving in the air. “Whisper it to me if you know it,” Ms. Cleary says. Most of the children whisper, “Jealous!”

After Ms. Cleary and her students finish the story, they return to their tables. Ms. Cleary says, “Today we were making inferences about what kind of mouse Lilly is by thinking about what she said and did in the story. Now, I want you to draw a picture of Lilly saying or doing something that showed her being *protective* and *caring* toward Julius.” As students get busy drawing their responses to the book, Ms. Cleary walks around their tables with the text in hand. If students seem stumped, Ms. Cleary asks if they’d like to look at the pictures in the book to help them infer.

Students are given an opportunity to respond to what they have heard and discussed in the Read Aloud.

¹⁶⁸ Henkes, Kevin. *Julius, the Baby of the World*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1990.

II. Shared Reading

During Shared Reading in all grade levels, students read chorally from a single text. The teacher reads along with students, his or her voice supporting their reading as needed. As students are more able to read text independently, teachers decrease and eventually eliminate their voice support. The teacher instructs the students to listen the voices of their classmates so that they are all reading at the same pace. Less able readers will listen to the other students while attempting to read and pronounce as many words as possible. Teachers often walk around the room during this time, helping readers to track print and pronounce words. The type of texts used in Shared Reading varies by grade level.

Shared Reading has several purposes:

- To build **book and print awareness** in Kindergarten and first grade students by modeling reading behaviors, such as reading from top to bottom and left to right
- To build **phonics skills** in students by providing instruction and repeated practice in decoding books on their independent level
- To increase the **reading accuracy and fluency** of students by providing instruction and repeated practice in reading a text quickly, easily, and with expression
- To advance the **reading comprehension strategies** of all students by teaching key competencies before, during and after reading the selection

In order for students to increase their literacy skills, teachers should consider the following when planning and conducting Shared Reading:

- **Choose Shared Reading texts carefully.** Typically in the Kindergarten through second grades, students read one enlarged text, such as a Big Book perched on an easel or the edge of the chalkboard, a poem or chant copied on to chart paper and hanging on a chart stand or the blackboard, class sets of picture books, or a short text copied onto a transparency and projected on the overhead. During the reading, use a pointer or your hand to track the print as you and your students read. From the middle of first grade on, students may read a story from an anthology book, a chapter from a novel, or a magazine article, in addition to reading poems, chants, or other enlarged texts. Texts for Shared Reading should be at the instructional level of most students in the class. Consider choosing a text that is connected to a thematic unit or lends itself to a particular comprehension strategy. For instance, if your fourth grade students are engrossed in a study of the ocean, you might choose an informational article about humpback whales in *Ranger Rick*, a children's wildlife magazine.
- **Use a variety of instructional methods to engage students in repeated reading.** As you read in chapter four, one of the most effective ways for students to build their reading accuracy and fluency is to read a text repeatedly. Think about the Shared Reading text you've chosen and then select one of many instructional methods to ensure that students remain engaged and are able to practice fluent reading.¹⁶⁹ **Choral reading**, the strategy used most frequently during Shared Reading, involves the teacher and all students reading a text aloud in a chorus; the voices of fluent readers help to support those who are less fluent. Variations of choral reading include having the teacher or a student read much of the text, while the whole group chimes in to read key parts, having tables or sides of the room read parts, or using a "call and response" method, in which one student reads a line or two and the class responds by repeating those lines.

¹⁶⁹ Rasinski, Timothy V. *The Fluent Reader: Oral Reading Strategies for Building Word Recognition, Fluency and Comprehension*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2003.

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To teach students to read with smooth, rhythmic expression (what linguists call *prosody*), you might choose a text and ask students to **echo read** the passage by sentence or line. You can model the correct phrasing and expression and then encourage students to mimic the sound of your voice.

Many teachers have found that **reader's theater** significantly improves the reading accuracy and fluency of their most struggling readers. To use this in your classroom, choose a script, assign parts to students, and then spend several days in structured practice. Students are motivated to improve the fluency and accuracy of their delivery because they know they will get to perform the script in front of classmates.

Classroom Snapshot: Shared Reading

Ms. Cleary's second graders have been studying how good readers use a variety of strategies, such as predicting, asking questions, and inferring, to help them understand their reading. Her students have learned that readers make predictions by using their background knowledge about characters or the familiar patterns of genres to make smart predictions about stories.

"Whiz kids, let me have your attention. Before we start Shared Reading today, I want to ask you to think for a minute about one strategy that we use to understand our reading—making predictions. When I'm reading a book and I make a prediction, I'm not just taking a random guess at what could happen. I'm really thinking hard about what I know about a character or what I know about a particular type, or genre, of story. Today, we are going to read *The Tortoise and the Hare* by Janet Stevens and make some predictions about the story by thinking about what we already know about the genre," she explains.

The students take out their anthology books and turn to the opening page of the story. "I want everyone to let his or her eyes scan the opening page of this story. What do you notice that might be helpful for us as we consider what could happen in this story?" Ms. Cleary inquires. The room is quiet as the students glance over the opening page, reading the title, looking at the pictures, and thinking. Finally, a hand shoots up. "Under the title it says that this story is a fable," announces Nikya. "We've read those before!"

All students have their own copy of the text used in Shared Reading.

"Yup—we sure have. What are the titles of some other fables that we've read?" Several heads turn to reference the class Bookworm, a list of all the books they've shared during Read Aloud and Shared Reading, color-coded by genre and posted on a giant inch-worm that crawls across the bulletin boards. "*The Ant and the Grasshopper!*" "*The Boy Who Cried Wolf!*"

Ms. Cleary helps students apply their understanding of a particular genre as they make predictions about a new story.

"From our reading of fables, what have we learned that might help us make smart predictions about *The Tortoise and the Hare*? Turn to your partner and share one thing you know about fables," directs Ms. Cleary. Students share their ideas, noting that most fables teach a lesson and use animal characters that act and talk like people. After the students share out their ideas, Ms. Cleary says, "So before I even read, I'm ready to make a prediction. I can see by your hands that many of you are too!

Joshua, want to share your prediction?" Joshua smiles. "I think that these animals are going to teach us a lesson about how to act," he explains. "Joshua, can you tell us why you think that?" Ms. Cleary asks. Joshua replies, "I think it because all of the fables we've read have taught us a lesson. One of the animals usually makes a big mistake. Remember how that grasshopper wasted all of his time singing and then didn't have any food saved up for winter?" Ms. Cleary responds, "I do remember that, Joshua. That's a good example of one lesson we learned from a fable."

As this is the first reading of this fable, Ms. Cleary reads a sentence or phrase aloud, and asks the students to repeat it back to her and make their voices sound similar. The short phrases and repetitive dialogue of the fable help the students to echo read with a high level of fluency, especially for a first reading. At a suspenseful moment in the story, Ms. Cleary pauses and says, "Wow! The hare thinks he's being so funny by lying down and taking a nap. I think he's trying to make fun of how slow Tortoise runs. But now I'm remembering what Joshua told us, that in fables, one character usually makes a big mistake that teaches him or her a lesson." After a few quiet moments, several students whisper, "Ooo, I know what's going to happen!" Ms. Cleary says, "I want you to use what you already know about fables to think about this story. What do you think might happen? Turn to your partner and make a prediction."

Students build fluency by mimicking Ms. Cleary's phrasing and expression through echo reading.

After a minute of discussion, Ms. Cleary says, "I am so impressed with how thoughtful your predictions are! Really smart thinking! Now, turn back to your partner and explain why you made that prediction. What made you think it? You might want to start with these words... *I predicted that because...*" and she writes those words on the board to get students started. Several moments later, Ms. Cleary asks Juan to share his partner's prediction. He shares, "Barry and I both think that the hare is going to lose the race." Ms. Cleary asks Barry to explain. "The hare is playing around and wasting all his time. He's not even running; he's just laughing at the tortoise and joking on him. And the tortoise doesn't pay him any mind and keeps walking. I think the hare is going to waste all of his time and the tortoise will catch up and beat him."

Ms. Cleary pushes her students to think more deeply about their predictions by basing them in the facts of the story or characteristics of the genre.

"Very good thinking, Barry and Juan. Let's continue reading and find out what happens," Ms. Cleary says. The class continues to echo read the story, and at the end, many students note that Barry and Juan's prediction came true. "Yes, Barry and Juan thought that Tortoise would win and they were right. What lesson does this fable teach us?" Ms. Cleary inquires. Nikya says, "It teaches us not to play around too much." Daquaz adds, "Also, that if you really want to win something, you've got to try hard and stay focused." Ms. Cleary says, "I think you're both right. Whiz kids, I am so impressed with the way you used your knowledge of fables to help you make good predictions. Make sure to do that when you are reading on your own."

III. Guided Reading

Guided Reading is a time to have students practice using decoding and comprehension strategies as they read a text that is on their instructional level (they can read it with 90% accuracy). Membership in a Guided Reading group is flexible and depends on the needs of students. The teacher makes sure to pick a text that is on the appropriate level and that allows students to practice a strategy that will address a pre-identified need. The teacher works with a small group (ideally, no more than six) to support their reading, making decisions about group membership and the focus of the lesson based upon ongoing assessment of what students are and are not doing to make meaning while they read.

Guided Reading can serve a variety of purposes, depending on the needs of students:

- To build **book and print awareness** in Kindergarten and first grade students by having students recognize the cover and back of a book and practice reading from top to bottom and left to right, for instance

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- To develop **phonics skills** in students by having students practice decoding words with a text that is on their instructional level
- To improve students' **reading accuracy and fluency** by teaching fluency mini-lessons and by asking students to repeatedly read a text
- To develop students' **reading comprehension skills** by having students use a particular comprehension strategy

Teachers plan and execute Guided Reading lessons with the following in mind:

- **Planning the lesson.** Determine Guided Reading group membership by considering the needs of individual readers, as well as their reading level. For instance, you might pull together several early readers who are unable to use punctuation to guide their oral reading—these are your students who never take a breath at a period. Though many students in your class might be early readers, only those students who are skipping over periods or question marks would be pulled for this Guided Reading lesson. Because you aim to address specific individual needs through these lessons, membership in a group is flexible; students rotate in and out of groups as particular needs arise and are addressed instructionally.

After grouping students and determining the objective, it's time to **choose a text** that is appropriate for the lesson. Many schools have sets of fiction and non-fiction texts suitable for Guided Reading; there are multiple copies of each book and books are leveled according to difficulty (Scholastic and Rigby books are commonly used). However, if your school does not have such a collection you might use selections from a basal reading series, or you could print out multiple copies of leveled texts from one of the myriad websites that now offer these at no charge. For a listing of a few, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 82: "Leveled Books"), which can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

- **Conducting the lesson.** Most often, you will have your small group join you at a common meeting area (either a table or a spot on the carpet) for Guided Reading lessons. Many teachers follow these steps to conduct a guided reading lesson:
 1. Hand out individual copies of the text to all members of the group and begin the lesson by introducing the book and setting the purpose for the lesson. For early and emergent readers, the book introduction is often a **picture walk**, a way to activate background knowledge and clarify challenging vocabulary. For fluent readers, you will say enough to get students interested in the text, relate it to their lives, and address any challenges inherent in the text.
 2. Regardless of their stage as a reader, students read the book on their own, simultaneously. Early and emergent readers will read aloud (it is often helpful to have them turn away from each other to avoid distraction), while fluent readers read silently.
 3. While students read, you should ask one student to read aloud for a bit while you listen and guide him or her to use the print concept, decoding skill, or reading strategy on which the lesson focuses. As you listen and guide each student, you might use this as an opportunity to informally assess fluency.
 4. Students should be encouraged to read the book several times during the course of the lesson to build fluency and further comprehension. Explain the purpose of this practice to your students so that they understand how important it is to their progress as readers.
 5. After students have finished reading, ask them to respond to the text, revisit particularly difficult passages, work with words and language from the text, or demonstrate understanding of their reading (though you won't do all of these things during one lesson).

- **Considering reading and developmental levels.** Both the format and the content of Guided Reading differ based upon the stage and developmental level of the readers in the group.
 - For early and emergent readers (usually Kindergarten through the middle of second grade), you will need to provide a great deal of support, through picture walks, exposure to the language of the book before reading, and attention to conventions of print. Though each student reads the text independently, early and emergent readers need to read aloud, often in a whisper voice. After the reading, ask students to respond through shared or interactive writing, drawing, or a shared retelling of the story. Some common objectives include: concepts about print (such as ending punctuation), decoding strategies (such as blending the words), and comprehension strategies (for example, identifying the story structure or identifying and using non-fiction structures, like a table of contents). Readers at these stages will read a new book almost every time they work in a guided reading group, but should continue to read their guided reading books during independent reading.
 - Fluent readers need less support from you during guided reading. Book introductions should be brief—just enough to spark students’ interest, give them the gist of the book, and allow them to connect it to background knowledge (including genre or author knowledge). Fluent readers will read silently, though you might ask a student to read out loud for a bit to monitor fluency and comprehension. After reading, students may have a discussion, respond to their reading in a journal, or reflect on their strengths and weaknesses as readers. For these comprehension activities to improve students’ reading, you must explicitly teach and model them for your students over a period of time until they can do it on their own.
- **Creating Literacy Centers.** Students who are not in the Guided Reading group are working independently or with partners, often at literacy centers. When creating literacy centers and assigning students to them, you should be guided by three questions. First, how will the practice done in this literacy center propel students forward as readers? Some centers, such as the art center, might marginally help students with their reading (as it can involve reading to follow directions), but do not genuinely help students learn to read. Second, in which center does each student need to work to become a more proficient reader? Students who need practice reading fluently might go to the listening center and whisper along with a recorded reading of a book. Partners might match pictures of rhyming words. Some students might use a reading response journal to draw or write about a book read independently or during Read Aloud, Shared, or Guided Reading. Regardless of grade level, students’ needs should dictate what they do when they’re not in a Guided Reading group. Finally, are students able to do this activity independently with a high rate of success? If you are conducting lessons with guided reading groups, you will be unable to provide any assistance to students working independently. For this reason, students must be able to complete any task at literacy centers entirely on their own. Teachers who do not carefully consider this issue often find their guided reading groups interrupted, their students off task, and the instructional needs of all children unmet.

Classroom Snapshot: Guided Reading

Ms. Cleary has asked Joshua, Tia, Barry, and Octavia to come to the back carpet for Guided Reading. Ms. Cleary knows from her reading conferences that these four students are beginning to read chapter books, but are not always able to remember what happened, particularly if they read one book over the course of several days. Ms. Cleary

Students are chosen for Guided Reading based on recent informal or formal assessment results. All students share a similar need.

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suspects that her students are not stopping to think about what’s happening in their stories as they read. As a first step, Ms. Cleary has decided to ask her students to write one or two sentences that summarize the most important things that have happened at the end of a section in a book.

“Boys and girls, during our independent reading conferences, I’ve started to notice something about each one of you. You are all starting to read chapter books! I can’t wait to hear about some of the amazing books that you’re going to read over the next few months of school. But I remember a problem I had when I first started reading chapter books, and I’m wondering if any of you are having it too. Have you ever read a chapter in a book and then found that you couldn’t remember what happened?” Four heads nod in unison. “Joshua, I’m going to put you on the spot for a minute. Will you tell everyone about the problem you had with your *Junie B. Jones* book the other day? Look back in your journal to remind yourself,” Ms. Cleary says. During an independent reading conference earlier in the week, Joshua had seemed unable to remember much of what was happening in book he was reading. Ms. Cleary had asked him to write this problem down on a sticky note and put it in his reading journal so that he could share with the group today. Joshua opens his notebook, reads for a moment, and replies, “Well, I was reading about the mushy gushy valentine and Ms. Cleary asked me why Junie B. thought the valentine was from Meanie Jim and I couldn’t remember.”

“Thanks for sharing, Joshua. When we start reading books that are longer, we’ve got to make sure that we are remembering the important things that have happened earlier in the book so that we can understand what’s happening later on in the book. Today, we’re going to practice writing down one summary sentence after we read a chapter. That sentence is going to summarize what we’ve read; it will remind us of the *most important* things that happened in that chapter. Does that make sense to everyone?” Ms. Cleary asks. Octavia raises her hand, “Are we supposed to write it in our reading journals?” Ms. Cleary replies, “Good question. We’re going to write it on a sticky note and at the end of the lesson, we’ll stick our notes in our journal.”

Ms. Cleary explains the specific skill that students will be working on during the Guided Reading lesson.

The book is carefully chosen to match the objective of the Guided Reading lesson. Each student gets a copy of the book and reads it to him or herself.

Ms. Cleary gives a brief introduction to *Martin and the Tooth Fairy*, explaining that after Martin realizes that his tooth fairy pays more money per tooth than those who visit other children’s homes, he comes up with a plan to make money off of his classmates’ teeth. Ms. Cleary has chosen this picture book because it is short enough to work through in one guided reading lesson and, though it does not have chapters, it has clear points at which students can stop and summarize.

Ms. Cleary says, “I want each of you to read the first part of the book silently. When you get to the end of that section, you’ll notice that I’ve put a sticky note there for you to write your summary sentence. Remember, the sentence is only to remind you of the most important things that happened in the part you just read. After you’ve written your summary sentence for the first part, you may go back and reread that part until everyone is ready to share. Can someone tell me what we’re going to do?” After Tia repeats the directions, the students get started.

As they read, Ms. Cleary moves around the table, leaning in and asking students to read out loud. When the students finish the chapter, Ms. Cleary looks at Barry and asks, “What are you thinking?” He responds with a blank look. “Octavia, can you help Barry out?” Ms. Cleary asks. “Um, I think we’re supposed to write something on our sticky note?” she replies, sounding more like she’s asking a question than making a statement.

Ms. Cleary realizes that her students are not ready to summarize on their own so she decides to take a different, more structured approach. “Let’s work through this first one together. Remember that we are writing one sentence that summarizes what this first part is all about. I’m going to share two ideas I have for what our first summary sentence could be. You tell me which one you think is better. Are you ready?” The students nod their heads. “Choice one: Martin lost his tooth at school and Cynthia called it ugly. Now listen to choice two: Martin put the tooth he lost under his pillow before bed and found four quarters there the next morning. Which one is a better summary sentence? Let me see everyone’s fingers voting for choice one or choice two.” As she glances around the circle, every child is holding two fingers in the air. “Ah... who can tell me why they’re voting for number two?” Barry looks eager to answer this time. “The first one didn’t tell what it was about. That was just something little that happened at the very beginning. You didn’t even tell about the money!” Ms. Cleary smiles and asks, “Do the rest of you agree?” Joshua, Tia, and Octavia nod in unison. Tia adds, “Yeah, sentence two tells the most important part of what happened.”

“Alright, now let’s keep reading, and when you get to your next sticky note, turn to your partner and decide together on a good summary sentence. Remember to tell the most important part.” Ms. Cleary instructs. Ms. Cleary pauses to look around at her other students busily working in centers. A quick scan shows all students reading, writing, or quietly working in partners as they should be. After about ten minutes, each pair has written a summary sentence and Ms. Cleary asks them to share. Tia and Barry read their sentence first: “Martin made a tooth business.” Then Joshua and Octavia volunteer: “Martin is going to try to make some money by putting other kids’ teeth under his pillow.” Ms. Cleary replies, “I like how Barry and Tia used the word *business* in their summary. But I think that Joshua and Octavia’s summary really gave us the most important part: that Martin is trying to make some money, or what we call a *profit*. Can we combine these so that we use that great word *business* and the detail about Martin trying to make a profit in one sentence?” The students combine the two sentences and write it on a sticky note. Ms. Cleary instructs, “Now let’s all read the next section and think of a summary sentence independently. Remember: we want the most important part.” The students read and write as Ms. Cleary listens to them one at a time, offering guidance and praise for excellent summary sentences.

Students not in the Guided Reading group work at other literacy centers on assignments they can complete without guidance from the teacher.

IV. Independent Reading

During Independent Reading, students put all that they’ve learned about decoding and comprehension into action as they choose and read books on their independent levels. Independent Reading serves a variety of purposes in the literacy classroom, including:

- To increase **book and print awareness** in Kindergarten and first graders by having students practice handling a book correctly and reading (even pictures) from top to bottom and left to right
- To improve **phonics skills** by having students decode words in books on their independent reading level
- To build **reading accuracy and fluency** by the repeated reading of books
- To boost **reading comprehension** by asking students to think and write about their reading and by exposing them to many vocabulary words

Simply allowing students to pick books and read for an extended period of time will do little to move them forward as readers. By considering the following questions you can ensure that each student is becoming a better reader every day during independent reading:

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- **What are students reading?** You must ensure that students are reading books on their independent reading level, meaning they can read them with 95% accuracy. Student choice is a hallmark of Independent Reading, and so we have the responsibility of teaching students how to pick books that are “just right” (on their independent level). Given that there will be students with a wide range of reading levels in one classroom, the requirement that every student have a “just right” book in his or her hands creates the need for a wide variety of types and levels of texts in the classroom library. Reading researcher Richard Allington has noted that every classroom library should contain 500 texts, equally split between fiction and nonfiction. Organization is key; books should be kept in baskets so that students can see the front cover and should be grouped by genre, reading level, or series. Students should keep several just right books in a “portable bookshelf” (often a freezer size Ziploc bag that travels between school and home). For a list of resources on where to find such reading materials, see again “Leveled Books” in the online **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 82). ✨
- **What is the teacher doing?** During independent reading, you will confer with individual students, take formal and informal assessments and have conversations about the student’s progress and about books he/she is reading. Use a variety of informal assessments, such as anecdotal notes and running records, or formal ones, like the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) or Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI). (Your district’s reading series probably includes these kinds of resources. Ask a colleague about the kinds of resources your district is using to analyze students’ reading progress.) In order to use data to inform your instruction, keep a record of all reading conferences that you have with students and examine the data you’ve gathered to identify individual needs. In addition to assessing students’ decoding skills, fluency, and comprehension, reading conferences are a perfect opportunity to determine a student’s interest in particular genres, writers or series and to assess their overall attitude toward reading.
- **How does this differ by grade level?** In Kindergarten and the beginning of first grade, students are often “reading” the pictures of their books and revisiting texts read in Shared Reading or created in Shared or Interactive Writing. Students at this stage will read out loud and may need to read with a partner or listen to a book on tape for some portion of Independent Reading. Students in upper elementary grades will likely be switching between Independent Reading and journal writing to track their thinking and monitor their comprehension. The time students spend reading independently varies according to grade level and time of year.

Classroom Snapshot: Independent Reading

Part way through Independent Reading, Ms. Cleary glances up from her conference table and smiles. Her students are spread out across the classroom—some sprawled out on pillows in the library and on both carpets, others sitting at several tables around the room. They all have their Ziploc bags with them, containing between two and five books that they chose when they arrived in the morning. There is a slight buzz in the classroom, as about half of her students still need to read out loud. While these students are audible, Ms. Cleary has taught them that their voices should never disturb other readers, so they “whisper read.”

During Independent Reading time, students read books they have chosen that are on their independent level.

Ms. Cleary is particularly pleased to see that after much hard work at the beginning of the year, her students are now choosing their own “just right” Independent Reading books. Joshua is working on his second book from the *Junie B. Jones* series; Juan, who loves non-fiction books, is reading *Rollercoaster Science*; Nikya giggles to herself as she reads *Itchy, Itchy Chicken Pox* for the fifth time.

She turns her attention back to Daquaz to continue their reading conference. He transferred into the class two days earlier, and Ms. Cleary’s goal for this conference is to determine his strengths and needs

Ms. Cleary uses this time to conference with individual students. Today, she uses part of the time to administer a phonics diagnostic to a new student.

as a reader. To this end, she has decided to administer the CORE Phonics Survey to assess his phonics-related skills.¹⁷⁰ Because she knows that Daquaz knows the names of all the alphabet letters, she begins the assessment by saying, “Daquaz, I’m so glad that you have joined our class. Today, I’m going to work with you for a little bit on your reading. I’m going to ask you to tell me what sound a letter makes and read some words for me. Does that sound good?”

Daquaz nods. “Okay, let’s begin. Look at these letters. Can you tell me the sound each letter makes?” After a few minutes, Ms. Cleary has determined that Daquaz knows all of the consonant and vowel sounds.

“Wow, you’re doing a great job, Let’s keep reading,” she encourages. “Now, I want you to read some words.” Daquaz begins to slowly decode, “*Sip... cat... let... but... hope* (for *hop*).” Ms. Cleary notes that he substituted *hope* for *hop*. As he made only one error in this first list, Ms. Cleary allows him to read the next line. “The second set will be made-up words. Don’t try to make them sound like real words,” she explains. Daquaz pauses and scrunches his face slightly. “Umm... *vope* (for *vop*)... *fute* (for *fut*)... *did*, I mean *dit*... *kem*... *lazy* (for *laz*).” He looks up expectantly. Ms. Cleary says, “Good. Thank you so much for reading with me today. We’re going to meet again tomorrow and talk together about your reading.” As he returns to his desk, Ms. Cleary makes a note in her assessment

When Ms. Cleary conferences and/or assesses students, she takes careful notes, synthesizes her thoughts, and plans future instruction.

notebook about the difficulty Daquaz had attempting to read the pseudo-words that contain short vowel sounds, even though he was able to pronounce all of the short vowel sounds. She thinks a good first step is to teach Daquaz that the vowel letters make different sounds depending on what other sounds are nearby. Tomorrow, she’ll begin teaching him about the closed syllable pattern in a small group and have him practice reading and writing words with this pattern for the next week.

V. Word Study

During Word Study, the teacher provides direct, systematic instruction in the basic building blocks of the English language so that students are able to decode and comprehend with ease. In a Balanced Literacy block, Word Study serves the following purposes:

- To develop **phonological awareness** by having students participate in activities that help them to hear rhymes, syllables, and onset/rimes
- To increase **phonics skills** by explicitly teaching students sound-spelling correspondences and patterns and decoding skills
- To build students’ **word and structural analysis** skills by teaching students to use parts of words (prefixes, suffixes, Greek and Latin roots) to decode multi-syllable words and understand word meaning

To conduct Word Study lessons that move students toward being independent, proficient readers, consider the following:

¹⁷⁰ CORE. *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures*. Novato, CA: Arena Press, 1999.

A Balanced Literacy Block

- **Understand how the written and spoken English language is constructed.** Excellent literacy teachers realize that teaching students the building blocks of reading is an enormous undertaking and that doing it effectively requires specific knowledge in the building blocks themselves. These teachers have a deep understanding of how the spoken and written English language is constructed. They use that knowledge to systematically teach students to articulate and manipulate sounds and use sound-spelling correspondences and patterns to read and spell.
- **Use direct, explicit, and systematic instructional methods.** Once you understand the building blocks of literacy, your task is to use explicit and systematic methods to teach your students to decode. During Word Study, use a variety of methods to build **phonological and phonemic awareness**, including:
 - Improve students’ ability to hear sounds by working with rhymes, riddles, and stories;
 - Teach rhymes and alliteration and play games to allow students to practice;
 - Scramble and unscramble sentences
 - Build sentences from individual words
 - Teach word segmentation by syllables; clap out syllables in students’ names and other familiar words
 - Draw students’ attention to their speech organs as they pronounce individual sounds;
 - Teach initial and final phoneme identification; have students practice identifying, deleting, and replacing initial and final phonemes; and
 - Teach children to put sounds together (blending) and take them apart (segmenting).

To teach students **phonics and the alphabetic principle**, use the following methods:

- Teach students to recognize upper and lower case letters by examining their shapes in alphabet books and on letter cards, modeling how they are formed, and asking students to write them;
- Explicitly and systematically teach students the relationship between sounds and letters, including consonants, consonant blends (/bl/, /gr/), digraphs (two successive letters that make one sound, such as /sh/ and /aw/), short and long vowels, and diphthongs (a speech sound made from two mouth manipulations, such as /oy/);
- Explicitly and systematically teach students to blend together sounds to decode unfamiliar words;
- Provide opportunities to practice phonics skills by building words that use the sound-spelling correspondences and patterns they have learned;
- Provide opportunities to practice phonics skills by sorting words that share a pattern; and
- Teach students non-decodable high-frequency words through a Word Wall.

Finally, as students become better able to decode, teach your students to use **word and structural analysis** to help them decode multi-syllabic words and understand their meanings in the following ways:

- Teach first graders compound words, simple contractions, and important word endings (like -ed and -ing);
- Teach second through fourth graders root words, simple prefixes and suffixes (like re- and -er), homophones, more complex contractions, and syllable types;
- Teach third through fifth graders complex prefixes and suffixes (like bi- and -tious); and
- Teach fourth through sixth graders the Greek and Latin roots of English words.

Classroom Snapshot: Word Study

Ms. Cleary's second graders are seated at their desks. "Whiz kids, get ready. It's time for Word Study. Listen very carefully as I call you to the carpet. Can everyone who has the /uh/ sound at the end of their name come to the carpet?" Octavia, Tia, and Nikya push in their chairs and join Ms. Cleary at the carpet. "Good listening girls. Now, anyone who has the /sh/ sound anywhere in their name, come on down!" After about thirty seconds, all of the students are sitting in their spots in front of the white board and Ms. Cleary says, "You all are becoming experts at blending words to help you read. Today, we are going to blend words with the long a sound, /ā/. Say the sound together and make sure your mouth makes a smile." The class says the long a sound in chorus. "Great. You all know that there are many ways that we can spell this sound, and today we are going to work with two of those spellings, ai_ and _ay." She writes those two spelling patterns on the white board. "Whiz kids, are you ready to blend?" Ms. Cleary asks. "Yeah!" her students answer. Ms. Cleary writes bay on the board.

Ms. Cleary uses even small opportunities to reinforce students' phonological and phonemic awareness.

Ms. Cleary: [Points to b] Sound.

Students: /b/

Ms. Cleary: [Points to ay] Sound.

Students: /ā/

Ms. Cleary: [Sweeps her finger under the word] Blend.

Students: /bay/

Ms. Cleary: [Sweeps her finger straight across] What word?

Students: Bay!

Ms. Cleary: Good! We live near the Chesapeake Bay.

Ms. Cleary: [Writes bail on the board and points to b] Sound.

Students: /b/

Ms. Cleary: [Points to ai] Sound.

Students: /ā/

Ms. Cleary: [Points to l] Sound.

Students: /l/

Ms. Cleary: [Sweeps her finger under the word] Blend.

Students: /bail/

Ms. Cleary: [Sweeps her finger straight across] What word?

Students: Bail!

Ms. Cleary uses a research-proven strategy to teach her students to blend sounds.

Ms. Cleary and her students continue blending the words *say*, *gray*, *snail*, *tray*, *trail*, and *spray* in the same manner. After six minutes, the students have blended all of the sample words. Ms. Cleary says, "Great blending! Now, I want you to take a moment and look at the words that we blended. What patterns do you notice?" The students are quiet for a moment. Juan raises his hand, "Three of the words start with *s* and two of them start with *b*." Ms. Cleary smiles, "Yes, that's true. Look again—do you see any other patterns?" Nikya offers, "Lots of the words have the /ā/ sound spelled with *ai* or *ay*." Ms. Cleary says, "Good noticing. Let's sort these words into two groups: one with the /ā/ sound spelled *ai* and the other with the /ā/ sound spelled *ay*." The students help Ms. Cleary sort all of the

Ms. Cleary has a deep knowledge of the English language and spelling rules and teaches those rules to her students.

words into two groups and then she points to the first and asks, "How do we spell the /ā/ sound at the end of a word?" The students respond, "AY!" Ms. Cleary nods, "Excellent. And how do we spell the /ā/ sound in the middle of a word?" The students answer, "AI!" Ms. Cleary says, "You've got it. When you are spelling and you hear the /ā/ sound in the middle of the word, you'll spell it... [the students complete her sentence]. And when you hear the /ā/ sound at the end of a word, you'll spell it..." The sorting and discussion of the spelling pattern takes ten minutes.

A Balanced Literacy Block

As the students return to their desks by twos, three volunteers pass out the dry erase markers and small white boards so that the students can complete their dictation exercise. “In our dictation today, we’ll spell words that have the /ā/ sound. How will you know which spelling pattern to use?” Joshua answer, “If it’s in the middle, use an *ai*. If it’s at the end, use an *ay*.” Ms. Cleary gives him a thumbs-up and says, “The first sentence to write is: We use a tray to bring our lunch to our table.” She repeats the sentence, and her students begin writing. Ms. Cleary walks behind their desks to quickly check for understanding. She bends down to provide support for Daquaz as he writes. “Good job. I like how you are thinking about our patterns to help you spell. The next sentence is: A gray snail lives in the sand by the bay. Think about our patterns and begin writing.” After reading aloud both sentences as a class, with partners, and on their own, the students use the socks that Ms. Cleary has given them as erasers to wipe off their white boards. The dictation activity has taken eight minutes. “Your reading and spelling is improving everyday. I am proud of how you’re thinking carefully about the sounds and patterns that we’ve learned to help you read and spell. Continue to do that when you are reading!”

VI. Writing

In the Writing portion of the balanced literacy block, teachers scaffold their instruction along the continuum of teacher directedness so that students are increasingly responsible for demonstrating their ability to use writing skills and strategies. Similar to quality reading instruction, excellent writing instruction begins with the teacher modeling a skill or process, moves to the teacher guiding students to use those skills or processes, and culminates in students writing independently. The purposes of writing instruction are:

- To increase **print awareness** by modeling and asking students to write from left to right and top to bottom, use capital and lower-case letters, leave space between words, and use ending punctuation
- To strengthen **phonics skills** by modeling and asking students to hear the individual sounds in words and represent those sounds with written letters
- To develop **writing skills and strategies** by modeling and asking students to use the stages of the writing process to communicate with others

To accomplish these purposes, consider the following as you plan and instruct:

- **Teach toward two broad goals.** As writing teachers, we have two concurrent goals for our students; we want them to apply their expanding understanding of sound-symbol relationships and English language conventions as they write letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs (the **mechanics**), and we want them to understand how to use the writing process to communicate ideas, messages, and stories with others (the **content**). This means that we teach students the skills (starting sentences with capital letters, saying a word slowly to hear all of its component sounds, or using details to support the main idea of a paragraph, for example), along with the steps of the writing process that allow writers to take a small idea conceived in prewriting and develop it into a piece worthy of publication.
- **Consider the developmental and literacy levels of your students.** We want our students to understand the writing process and to produce independently many pieces in a variety of genres. However, we have to consider the developmental and literacy levels of our students as we plan our writing instruction. We cannot expect first graders to work through each step of the writing process as thoroughly as we would our fourth graders. With this in mind, consider the following examples of ways you might structure your writing classroom.

- In a Writer’s Workshop, you will plan units of study around a genre (such as narrative or persuasive writing), identify the skills that you want students to master, and then plan some lessons that will teach students to incorporate those skills in their writing and others that will teach students to use the writing process effectively. Begin your Writer’s Workshop with a mini-lesson that provides direct instruction and models exactly what you want your students to be able to do independently. The focus of the mini-lesson depends on the skills students need to master, the needs of individual students, and the stage of the writing process in which students are working. While students write independently, you will conference with individuals, guiding them through tough spots, helping them to master the objective of the mini-lesson, and asking them to reflect on their craft. Writer’s Workshop develops students into independent writers who use a process to create compositions in many genres.
- Students in Kindergarten and first grade typically are not ready to work on longer writing projects using a Writer’s Workshop model. You might conduct Interactive Writing lessons, in which students share the pen with the teacher and add letters, words, or pieces of punctuation to class writing. After the class piece is finished, be sure to read and reread the ultimate composition.

Classroom Snapshot: Writing

As Ms. Cleary begins Writing Workshop, she knows that her students are excited to begin a new writing project. They have spent four weeks learning about and creating personal narratives, culminating in a publishing party that many of the students’ parents and grandparents attended. Now, with her students sitting before her, Ms. Cleary prepares to begin the writing process with them again, this time to produce a persuasive letter. “I’m excited to tell you that today we are going to learn how to write in a new genre. We spent a long time creating personal narratives, and your families were as proud of your work as I was! Today, we are going to begin a new writing project. Before we get started, I’m going to read you a story about a little girl, someone just about your age, who is exceptional at the type of thinking and writing you will need to do in this new writing project. The little girl’s name is Tillie. Listen as I read about her.”

Ms. Cleary begins to read *A Fine, Fine School* by Sharon Creech to the students. She pauses periodically to allow students to predict, share reactions, and comment on Tillie’s actions as she persuades her principal, Mr. Keene, not to keep their “fine, fine school” open on Saturdays, Sundays, holidays, and summer break so that even more learning can occur.

Ms. Cleary uses quality children’s literature in a particular genre to introduce students to the elements they will incorporate into their own writing.

When done reading, Ms. Cleary closes the book and leans forward in her chair. “Tell me this, boys and girls – did the students and teachers agree with Mr. Keene’s decision to keep school open every day of the year?” The students respond, “Noooooo.” Ms. Cleary continues, “So *why* did no one want to tell Mr. Keene that they didn’t want to go to school so much?” Barry raises his hand eagerly. “Everyone knew how that he liked school – he called it a fine, fine school, so no one wanted to hurt his feelings.” Joshua chimes in, “The students were scared that he would be angry.” Tia adds, “Maybe the teachers were nervous that they would be fired. My mom was worried about getting fired one time, so she didn’t talk back to her boss when she wanted to.”

A Balanced Literacy Block

Ms. Cleary uses the story to draw out and teach students about the elements of persuasion, such as how and why we persuade. Students need to know this in order to effectively write a persuasive letter.

“Those are all very good observations about why no one told Mr. Keene that they didn’t like his decision to make school open every day of the year. Now tell me this – was *Tillie* scared or worried about hurting Mr. Keene’s feelings?” Students shake their heads. “So what did Tillie do?” Octavia’s hand shoots up. “She wasn’t afraid – she gave him reasons why they should not have school all those days.” Ms. Cleary smiles. “That’s exactly right, she gave him reasons, lots of reasons, why she didn’t think they should have school on the weekends, on holidays, and over the summer. Do you think they were good reasons?” Students seem puzzled at first. Ms. Cleary explains, “Well, let’s think about what Mr. Keene did when he heard Tillie’s reasons to not have school all those days. Did he agree with her?” Heads nod. “So if he agreed with her, do you think Tillie’s reasons had to have been good reasons?” Heads nod again. Ms. Cleary wants to be sure students truly understand. “What if Tillie had told Mr. Keene to not have school all those days because she wanted to play Nintendo, ride her bike, and watch TV. Would those reasons have been good? Would they have convinced Mr. Keene to not have the school open so much?” “No,” Joshua says, “because Mr. Keene only cared about people learning. He would have thought that playing Nintendo instead of coming to school to learn was a waste of time.”

“Good, Joshua! You know, I think that Tillie thought very carefully about *who* she was trying to persuade before she decided on the reasons she would use. She thought about what was important to Mr. Keene—and and we know from the story that Mr. Keene loved his school and loved having students learn every day—and so Tillie used that in her reasons. Does anyone else agree? Why?” Students point out that Tillie showed Mr. Keene that if school happened on every single day of the year, students would end up *not* learning as much, which he would be sad about. “That’s exactly right, boys and girls. Tillie showed Mr. Keene a new way of thinking about having school open every day. Here’s another way to say that: Tillie *persuaded* Mr. Keene to change his mind and share her way of thinking.”

Ms. Cleary moves to her chart stand and writes at the top of the chart paper: *Why do we persuade?* “We know that Tillie persuaded Mr. Keene to change his mind because she didn’t agree with his decision.” Under “Why do we persuade?” Ms. Cleary writes, “to change people’s decisions.” She turns back to her students and asks, “What are some other reasons that we persuade people to change their minds? Think about books we have read, or situations in your own life.” Ms. Cleary guides students as they share suggestions for why they persuade people: to change someone’s opinion or rule, to convince someone to think like you do about an issue, to take a stand for something, to show people another way to think, to argue with reasons. When done, Ms. Cleary steps back to look at the chart. “This is a great list of why we persuade. I want to give you some time to write in your notebooks now. Here are the questions for you to write about: ‘What does it mean to persuade? Why do we persuade?’ Use your own words and think about examples from books we have read. While you are journaling, I’m going to conference with a few of you about your writing.”

As students move to their desks or a table to write, Ms. Cleary circulates with her writing conference chart on a clipboard. A quick glance reminds her to check in first with Barry, as he benefits from talking through his ideas with someone before he begins to write. After hearing him say the complete sentence he will write down for each question, Ms. Cleary moves on to Octavia, who has already begun to write. Ms. Cleary notes her excellent responses and simply reminds her to leave space between her words. Joshua is moving forward as well, but is stuck on how to spell the word *convince*. Ms. Cleary helps him to say the word slowly to hear the sounds and write the related letters, which results in Joshua scripting *kunvince* on the page. Ms. Cleary

Ms. Cleary uses the independent writing time to monitor and build different skills in different students.

knows that she will need to read each student's notebook later to ensure all students have understood the introductory persuasion concepts presented in the lesson.

To close the lesson, Ms. Cleary asks students to move near a partner and read their responses to the questions to each other. Ms. Cleary plans to have students continue in the pre-writing stage of the process by reading *Earrings!* by Judith Viorst and *The Great Kapok Tree* by Lynne Cherry. Then, the students will take a tour around their school, bringing their writer's notebooks to jot down their ideas of how they could convince someone in school (the principal, another teacher, their classmates) to do something that would improve the school for everyone.

Conclusion

All previous chapters of this text have addressed the research, foundational knowledge and instructional strategies you need to become an exemplary teacher of reading and writing for elementary students. No doubt, the synthesis of this information will take careful consideration and significant practice, although this final chapter should serve to give you a more detailed view of how the information interweaves to produce the balanced literacy block. Teaching children to read and write is incredibly difficult. It is not a process you can design by relying on your own education, advanced literacy skills, or love for books. As we hope this text has made abundantly clear, there is a science to teaching children to decode words and read independently, and you must learn to apply that science to your teaching. We also realize that by this point in the text, we don't need to impress this point upon you any longer. Your sense of urgency is heightened. You will arrive at the summer institute ready to build on what you have read. You will leave the summer institute with an even stronger foundation in the science of teaching students to read and write. You will arrive in your fall classroom committed to continued professional development in literacy, believing that teaching our students to read and write proficiently is critical to our ability to lead students to significant academic gains, and a key way to put our students on the path toward a better future.

Elementary Literacy

Related Readings 

Second Edition
June 2003

Put Reading First

*The Research Building Blocks for
Teaching Children to Read*

KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 3



Put Reading First:

The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read

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The National Institute for Literacy

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), an independent federal organization, supports the development of high-quality state, regional, and national literacy services so that all Americans can develop the literacy skills they need to succeed at work, at home, and in the community.

The Partnership for Reading

This document was published by the Partnership for Reading, a collaborative effort of the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to make scientifically based reading research available to educators, parents, policy-makers, and others with an interest in helping all people learn to read well. The findings and conclusions in this publication were drawn from the 2000 report of the National Reading Panel, Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction—Reports of the Subgroups.

Introduction

In today's schools, too many children struggle with learning to read. As many teachers and parents will attest, reading failure has exacted a tremendous long-term consequence for children's developing self-confidence and motivation to learn, as well as for their later school performance.

While there are no easy answers or quick solutions for optimizing reading achievement, an extensive knowledge base now exists to show us the skills children must learn in order to read well. These skills provide the basis for sound curriculum decisions and instructional approaches that can help prevent the predictable consequences of early reading failure.

The National Reading Panel (NRP) issued a report in 2000 that responded to a Congressional mandate to help parents, teachers, and policymakers identify key skills and methods central to reading achievement. The Panel was charged with reviewing research in reading instruction (focusing on the critical years of kindergarten through third grade) and identifying methods that consistently relate to reading success.

The Panel reviewed more than 100,000 studies. Through a carefully developed screening procedure, Panel members examined research that met several important criteria:

- the research had to address achievement of **one or more skills in reading**. Studies of effective teaching were not included unless reading achievement was measured;
- the research had to be **generalizable** to the larger population of students. Thus, case studies with small numbers of children were excluded from the analysis;
- the research needed to examine the **effectiveness** of an approach. This type of research requires the comparison of different treatments, such as comparing the achievement of students using guided repeated reading to another group of students not using that strategy. This experimental research approach was necessary to understand whether changes in achievement could be attributed to the treatment;
- the research needed to be regarded as **high quality**. An article or book had to have been reviewed by other scholars from the relevant field and judged to be sound and worthy of publication. Therefore, discussions of studies reported in meetings or conferences without a stringent peer review process were excluded from the analysis.

These criteria are not new in the world of educational research; they are often used as a matter of course by researchers who set out to determine the effectiveness of any educational program or approach. The National Reading Panel embraced the criteria in its review to bring balance to a field in which decisions have often been made based more on ideology than evidence. These criteria offer administrators, teachers, and parents a standard for evaluating critical decisions about how children will be taught to read. In addition to identifying effective practices, the work of the National Reading Panel challenges educators to consider the evidence of effectiveness whenever they make decisions about the content and structure of reading instruction programs. By operating on a “what works” basis, scientific evidence can help build a foundation for instructional practice. Teachers can learn about and emphasize methods and approaches that have worked well and caused reading improvement for large numbers of children. Teachers can build their students’ skills efficiently and effectively, with greater results than before. Most important, with targeted “what works” instruction, the incidence of reading success should increase dramatically.

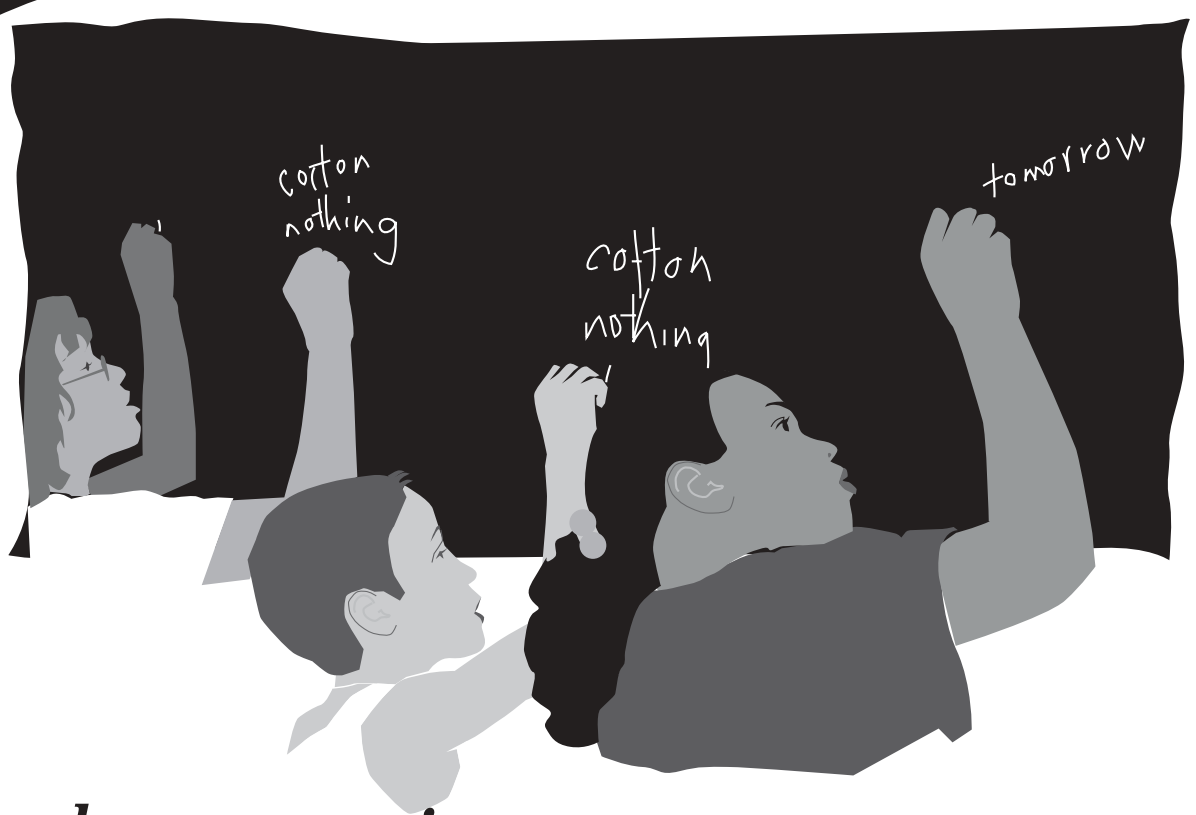
This guide, designed by teachers for teachers, summarizes what researchers have discovered about how to successfully teach children to read. It describes the findings of the National Reading Panel Report and provides analysis and discussion in five areas of reading instruction: **phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary,** and **text comprehension**. Each section defines the skill, reviews the evidence from research, suggests implications for classroom instruction, describes proven strategies for teaching reading skills, and addresses frequently raised questions.

Our understanding of “what works” in reading is dynamic and fluid, subject to ongoing review and assessment through quality research. This guide begins the process of compiling the findings from scientifically based research in reading instruction, a body of knowledge that will continue to grow over time. We encourage all teachers to explore the research, open their minds to changes in their instructional practice, and take up the challenge of helping all children become successful readers.





*phonemic
awareness
instruction*



phonemic awareness instruction

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words. Before children learn to read print, they need to become aware of how the sounds in words work. They must understand that words are made up of speech sounds, or phonemes.

Phonemes are the smallest parts of sound in a spoken word that make a difference in the word's meaning. For example, changing the first phoneme in the word **hat** from /h/ to /p/ changes the word from **hat** to **pat**, and so changes the meaning. (A letter between slash marks shows the phoneme, or sound, that the letter represents, and not the name of the letter: For example, the letter **h** represents the sound /h/.)

Children can show us that they have phonemic awareness in several ways, including:

- recognizing which words in a set of words begin with the same sound (“**Bell, bike, and boy** all have /b/ at the beginning.”);
- isolating and saying the first or last sound in a word (“The beginning sound of **dog** is /d/.” “The ending sound of **sit** is /t/.”);
- combining, or blending the separate sounds in a word to say the word (“/m/, /a/, /p/— **map**.”);
- breaking, or segmenting a word into its separate sounds (“**up**—/u/, /p/.”).

Children who have phonemic awareness skills are likely to have an easier time learning to read and spell than children who have few or none of these skills.

Although phonemic awareness is a widely used term in reading, it is often misunderstood. One misunderstanding is that phonemic awareness and phonics are the same thing. Phonemic awareness is **not** phonics. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that the sounds of **spoken** language work together to make words. Phonics is the understanding that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes and graphemes, the letters that represent those sounds in **written** language. If children are to benefit from phonics instruction, they need phonemic awareness.

The reason is obvious: children who cannot hear and work with the phonemes of spoken words will have a difficult time learning how to relate these phonemes to the graphemes when they see them in written words.

Another misunderstanding about phonemic awareness is that it means the same as phonological awareness. The two names are **not** interchangeable. Phonemic awareness is a subcategory of phonological awareness. The focus of phonemic awareness is narrow—identifying and manipulating the individual sounds in words. The focus of phonological awareness is much broader: It includes identifying and manipulating larger parts of spoken language, such as words, syllables, and onsets and rimes—as well as phonemes. It also encompasses awareness of other aspects of sound, such as rhyming, alliteration, and intonation.

Children can show us that they have phonological awareness in several ways, including:

- identifying and making oral rhymes;
 - “**The pig has a (wig).**”
 - “**Pat the (cat).**”
 - “**The sun is (fun).**”
- identifying and working with syllables in spoken words;
 - “**I can clap the parts in my name: An-drew.**”
- identifying and working with onsets and rimes in spoken syllables or one-syllable words;
 - “**The first part of sip is s-.**”
 - “**The last part of win is -in.**”
- identifying and working with individual phonemes in spoken words.
 - “**The first sound in sun is /s/.**”

Phonological awareness

Phonemic awareness is only one type of phonological awareness.

Broader phonological awareness

Narrower phonological awareness

Identifying and making oral rhymes	Identifying and working with syllables in spoken words	Identifying and working with onsets and rimes in spoken syllables	Identifying and working with individual phonemes in words spoken (phonemic awareness)
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The language of literacy

Here are some definitions of terms used frequently in reading instruction.

PHONEME

A **phoneme** is the smallest part of *spoken* language that makes a difference in the meaning of words. English has about 41 phonemes. A few words, such as *a* or *oh*, have only one phoneme. Most words, however, have more than one phoneme: The word *if* has two phonemes (/i/ /f/); *check* has three phonemes (/ch/ /e/ /k/), and *stop* has four phonemes (/s/ /t/ /o/ /p/). Sometimes one phoneme is represented by more than one letter.

GRAPHEME

A **grapheme** is the smallest part of *written* language that represents a phoneme in the spelling of a word. A grapheme may be just one letter, such as *b*, *d*, *f*, *p*, *s*; or several letters, such as *ch*, *sh*, *th*, *-ck*, *ea*, *-igh*.

PHONICS

Phonics is the understanding that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes (the sounds of *spoken* language) and graphemes (the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in *written* language).

PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds—phonemes—in spoken words.

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Phonological awareness is a broad term that includes phonemic awareness. In addition to phonemes, phonological awareness activities can involve work with rhymes, words, syllables, and onsets and rimes.

SYLLABLE

A **syllable** is a word part that contains a vowel or, in spoken language, a vowel sound (*e-vent*; *news-pa-per*; *ver-y*).

ONSET AND RIME

Onsets and rimes are parts of spoken language that are smaller than syllables but larger than phonemes. An **onset** is the initial consonant(s) sound of a syllable (the onset of *bag* is *b-*; of *swim*, *sw-*). A **rime** is the part of a syllable that contains the vowel and all that follows it (the rime of *bag* is *-ag*; of *swim*, *-im*).



What does scientifically based research tell us about phonemic awareness instruction?

Key findings from the scientific research on phonemic awareness instruction provide the following conclusions of particular interest and value to classroom teachers:

Phonemic awareness can be taught and learned.

Effective phonemic awareness instruction teaches children to notice, think about, and work with (manipulate) sounds in spoken language. Teachers use many activities to build phonemic awareness, including:

Phoneme isolation

Children recognize individual sounds in a word.

Teacher: What is the first sound in **van**?

Children: The first sound in **van** is /v/.

Phoneme identity

Children recognize the same sounds in different words.

Teacher: What sound is the same in **fix, fall,** and **fun**?

Children: The first sound, /f/, is the same.

Phoneme categorization

Children recognize the word in a set of three or four words that has the “odd” sound.

Teacher: Which word doesn’t belong? **bus, bun, rug.**

Children: **Rug** does not belong. It doesn’t begin with /b/.

Phoneme blending

Children listen to a sequence of separately spoken phonemes, and then combine the phonemes to form a word. Then they write and read the word.

Teacher: What word is /b/ /i/ /g/?

Children: /b/ /i/ /g/ is **big.**

Teacher: Now let’s write the sounds in **big**: /b/, write **b**; /i/, write **i**; /g/, write **g.**

Teacher: (Writes **big** on the board.) Now we’re going to read the word **big.**

Phoneme segmentation

Children break a word into its separate sounds, saying each sound as they tap out or count it. Then they write and read the word.

Teacher: How many sounds are in **grab**?

Children: /g/ /r/ /a/ /b/. Four sounds.

Teacher: Now let’s write the sounds in **grab**: /g/, write **g**; /r/, write **r**; /a/, write **a**; /b/, write **b.**

Teacher: (Writes **grab** on the board.) Now we’re going to read the word **grab.**

Phoneme deletion

Children recognize the word that remains when a phoneme is removed from another word.

Teacher: What is **smile** without the /s/?

Children: **Smile** without the /s/ is **mile**.

Phoneme addition

Children make a new word by adding a phoneme to an existing word.

Teacher: (What word do you have if you add /s/ to the beginning of **park**?)

Children: **Spark**.

Phoneme substitution

Children substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word.

Teacher: The word is **bug**. Change /g/ to /n/. What's the new word?

Children: **Bun**.

Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to read.

Phonemic awareness instruction improves children's ability to read words. It also improves their reading comprehension. Phonemic awareness instruction aids reading comprehension primarily through its influence on word reading. For children to understand what they read, they must be able to read words rapidly and accurately. Rapid and accurate word reading frees children to focus their attention on the meaning of what they read. Of course, many other things, including the size of children's vocabulary and their world experiences, contribute to reading comprehension.

Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to spell.

Teaching phonemic awareness, particularly how to segment words into phonemes, helps children learn to spell. The explanation for this may be that children who have phonemic awareness understand that sounds and letters are related in a predictable way. Thus, they are able to relate the sounds to letters as they spell words.

Some common phonemic awareness terms

PHONEME MANIPULATION

When children work with phonemes in words, they are manipulating the phonemes. Types of phoneme manipulation include blending phonemes to make words, segmenting words into phonemes, deleting phonemes from words, adding phonemes to words, or substituting one phoneme for another to make a new word.

BLENDING

When children combine individual phonemes to form words, they are blending the phonemes. They also are blending when they combine onsets and rimes to make syllables and combine syllables to make words.

SEGMENTING (SEGMENTATION)

When children break words into their individual phonemes, they are segmenting the words. They are also segmenting when they break words into syllables and syllables into onsets and rimes.



Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when children are taught to manipulate phonemes by using the letters of the alphabet.

Phonemic awareness instruction makes a stronger contribution to the improvement of reading and spelling when children are taught to use letters as they manipulate phonemes than when instruction is limited to phonemes alone. Teaching sounds along with the letters of the alphabet is important because it helps children to see how phonemic awareness relates to their reading and writing. Learning to blend phonemes with letters helps children read words. Learning to segment sounds with letters helps them spell words.

If children do not know letter names and shapes, they need to be taught them along with phonemic awareness.

Relating sounds to letters is, of course, the heart of phonics instruction, which is the subject of the next section of this booklet.

Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when it focuses on only one or two types of phoneme manipulation, rather than several types.

Children who receive instruction that focuses on one or two types of phoneme manipulation make greater gains in reading and spelling than do children who are taught three or more types of manipulation.

One possible explanation for this is that children who are taught many different ways to manipulate phonemes may become confused about which type to apply. Another explanation is that teaching many types of manipulations does not leave enough time to teach any one type thoroughly. A third explanation is that instruction that includes several types of manipulations may result in teaching children more difficult manipulations before they acquire skill in the easier ones.

Questions you may have about phonemic awareness instruction

Which activities will help my students acquire phonemic awareness?

Your instruction to increase children's phonemic awareness can include various activities in blending and segmenting words. Clearly, however, you should provide your students with instruction that is appropriate for their level of literacy development. If you teach younger children or less able, older readers, your instruction should begin with easier activities, such as having children identify and categorize the first phonemes in words. When the children can do these activities, move them on to more difficult ones.

Which methods of phonemic awareness instruction will have the greatest impact on my students' learning to read?

You can use a variety of teaching methods that contribute to children's success in learning to read. However, teaching one or two types of phoneme manipulation—specifically blending and segmenting phonemes in words—is likely to produce greater benefits to your students' reading than teaching several types of manipulation.

Teaching your students to manipulate phonemes along with letters can also contribute to their reading success.

Your instruction should also be explicit about the connection between phonemic awareness and reading. For example:

Teacher: Listen: I'm going to say the sounds in the word **jam**—/j/ /a/ /m/.

What is the word?

Children: **Jam.**

Teacher: You say the sounds in the word **jam**.

Children: /j/ /a/ /m/.

Teacher: Now let's write the sounds in **jam**: /j/, write **j**; /a/, write **a**; /m/, write **m**.

Teacher: (Writes **jam** on the board.) Now we're going to read the word **jam**.

Which of my students will benefit from phonemic awareness instruction?

Phonemic awareness instruction can help essentially all of your students learn to read, including preschoolers, kindergartners, first graders who are just starting to read, and older, less able readers.

Phonemic awareness instruction can help most of your students learn to spell. Instruction can be effective with preschoolers, kindergartners, and first graders. It can help children from all economic levels.

How much time should I spend on phonemic awareness instruction?

You do not need to devote a lot of class time to phonemic awareness instruction. Over the school year, your entire phonemic awareness program should take no more than 20 hours.

Your students will differ in their phonemic awareness. Some will need more instruction than others. The best approach is to assess students' phonemic awareness before you begin instruction. Assessment will let you know which students do and do not need the instruction, which students should be taught the easier types of phoneme manipulation (such as identifying initial sounds in words), and which should receive instruction in more advanced types (such as segmenting, blending, deletion/addition, and substitution).

Should I teach phonemic awareness to individual students, to small groups, or to the whole class?

In general, small-group instruction is more effective in helping your students acquire phonemic awareness and learn to read. Small-group instruction may be more effective than individual or whole-group instruction because children often benefit from listening to their classmates respond and receive feedback from the teacher.

Do we know enough about the effectiveness of phonemic awareness instruction for me to implement it in my classroom?

Yes. Bear in mind, however, that phonemic awareness instruction is not a complete reading program; it cannot guarantee the reading and writing success of your students. Adding well-thought-out phonemic awareness instruction to a beginning reading program or to a remedial reading program is very likely to help your students learn to read and spell. Whether these benefits are lasting, however, will depend on the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of the entire literacy curriculum.



Summing up

Phonemic awareness is

- the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds—phonemes—in spoken words.
-

Phonemic awareness is important because

- it improves children's word reading and reading comprehension.
 - it helps children learn to spell.
-

Phonemic awareness can be developed through a number of activities, including asking children to

- identify phonemes,
 - categorize phonemes,
 - blend phonemes to form words,
 - segment words into phonemes,
 - delete or add phonemes to form new words, and
 - substitute phonemes to make new words.
-

Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective

- when children are taught to manipulate phonemes by using the letters of the alphabet.
- when instruction focuses on only one or two rather than several types of phoneme manipulation.



*phonics
instruction*



phonics instruction

Phonics instruction teaches children the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. It teaches children to use these relationships to read and write words. Teachers of reading and publishers of programs of beginning reading instruction sometimes use different labels to describe these relationships, including the following:

- ***graphophonemic relationships***
- ***letter-sound associations***
- ***letter-sound correspondences***
- ***sound-symbol correspondences***
- ***sound-spellings***

Regardless of the label, the goal of phonics instruction is to help children learn and use the alphabetic principle—the understanding that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds. Knowing these relationships will help children recognize familiar words accurately and automatically, and “decode” new words. In short, knowledge of the alphabetic principle contributes greatly to children’s ability to read words both in isolation and in connected text.

Critics of phonics instruction argue that English spellings are too irregular for phonics instruction to really help children learn to read words. The point is, however, that phonics instruction teaches children a system for remembering how to read words. Once children learn, for example, that **phone** is spelled this way rather than **foan**, their memory helps them to read, spell, and recognize the word instantly and more accurately than they could read **foan**. The same process is true for all irregularly spelled words. Most of these words contain some regular letter-sound relationships that can help children remember how to read them. In summary, the alphabetic system is a mnemonic device that supports our memory for specific words.

What does scientifically based research tell us about phonics instruction?

Key findings from the scientific research on phonics instruction include the following conclusions of particular interest and value to classroom teachers:

Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is more effective than non-systematic or no phonics instruction.

Systematic and explicit phonics instruction makes a bigger contribution to children's growth in reading than instruction that provides non-systematic or no phonics instruction.

How do systematic programs of phonics instruction differ from non-systematic programs? The hallmark of programs of systematic phonics instruction is the direct teaching of a set of letter-sound relationships in a clearly defined sequence. The set includes the major sound/spelling relationships of both consonants and vowels.

The programs also provide materials that give children substantial practice in applying knowledge of these relationships as they read and write. These materials include books or stories that contain a large number of words that children can decode by using the letter-sound relationships they have learned and are learning. The programs also might provide children with opportunities to spell words and to write their own stories with the letter-sound relationships they are learning.

Approaches to phonics instruction

Most teachers are acquainted with several approaches to phonics instruction, including those listed below. The distinctions between approaches are not absolute, and some programs of instruction combine approaches.

Synthetic phonics Children learn how to convert letters or letter combinations into sounds, and then how to blend the sounds together to form recognizable words.

Analytic phonics Children learn to analyze letter-sound relationships in previously learned words. They do not pronounce sounds in isolation.

Analogy-based phonics Children learn to use parts of word families they know to identify words they don't know that have similar parts.

Phonics through spelling Children learn to segment words into phonemes and to make words by writing letters for phonemes.

Embedded phonics Children are taught letter-sound relationships during the reading of connected text. (Since children encounter different letter-sound relationships as they read, this approach is not systematic or explicit.)

Onset-rime phonics instruction Children learn to identify the sound of the letter or letters before the first vowel (the onset) in a one-syllable word and the sound of the remaining part of the word (the rime).

Systematic and explicit phonics instruction significantly improves kindergarten and first-grade children’s word recognition and spelling.

Systematic phonics instruction produces the greatest impact on children’s reading achievement when it begins in kindergarten or first grade.

Both kindergarten and first-grade children who receive systematic phonics instruction are better at reading and spelling words than kindergarten and first-grade children who do not receive systematic instruction.

Systematic and explicit phonics instruction significantly improves children’s reading comprehension.

Systematic phonics instruction results in better growth in children’s ability to comprehend what they read than non-systematic or no phonics instruction. This is not surprising because the ability to read the words in a text accurately and quickly is highly related to successful reading comprehension.

Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is effective for children from various social and economic levels.

Systematic phonics instruction is beneficial to children regardless of their socioeconomic status. It helps children from various backgrounds make greater gains in reading than non-systematic instruction or no phonics instruction.



Programs of systematic and explicit phonics instruction

Systematic and explicit phonics instruction provides practice with letter-sound relationships in a predetermined sequence. Children learn to use these relationships to decode words that contain them.



Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is particularly beneficial for children who are having difficulty learning to read and who are at risk for developing future reading problems.

Systematic phonics instruction is significantly more effective than non-systematic or no phonics instruction in helping to prevent reading difficulties among at-risk students and in helping children overcome reading difficulties.

Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is most effective when introduced early.

Phonics instruction is most effective when it begins in kindergarten or first grade. To be effective with young learners, systematic instruction must be designed appropriately and taught carefully. It should include teaching letter shapes and names, phonemic awareness, and all major letter-sound relationships. It should ensure that all children learn these skills. As instruction proceeds, children should be taught to use this knowledge to read and write words.

Phonics instruction is not an entire reading program for beginning readers.

Along with phonics instruction, young children should be solidifying their knowledge of the alphabet, engaging in phonemic awareness activities, and listening to stories and informational texts read aloud to them. They also should be reading texts (both out loud and silently), and writing letters, words, messages, and stories.

Questions you may have about phonics instruction

Do we know enough about the effectiveness of systematic and explicit phonics instruction for me to implement it in my classroom?

Yes. Many teachers are teaching phonics systematically and explicitly and have been doing so for years. Their results, along with the findings of three decades of research, confirm the importance and effectiveness of systematic phonics instruction, particularly in kindergarten and first- and second-grade classrooms.

How can I tell if a phonics program is systematic and explicit?

A program of systematic phonics instruction clearly identifies a carefully selected and useful set of letter-sound relationships and then organizes the introduction of these relationships into a logical instructional sequence. The instructional sequence may include the relationships between the sounds associated with single letters (for example, the sound /m/ with the letter **m**), as well as with larger units of written language (for example, letter combinations such as **th** or **ing** or spelling patterns such as **ea** or **ie**). Furthermore, a systematic program of instruction provides children with ample opportunities to practice the relationships they are learning.

What do non-systematic programs of phonics instruction look like?

Programs of phonics instruction that are not systematic do not teach consonant and vowel letter-sound relationships in a prescribed sequence. Rather, they encourage informal phonics instruction based on the teacher's perceptions of what students need to learn and when they need to learn it.

General guidelines

Evaluating programs of phonics instruction

Effective programs offer phonics instruction that:

- helps teachers explicitly and systematically instruct students in how to relate letters and sounds, how to break spoken words into sounds, and how to blend sounds to form words;
- helps students understand why they are learning the relationships between letters and sounds;
- helps students apply their knowledge of phonics as they read words, sentences, and text;
- helps students apply what they learn about sounds and letters to their own writing;
- can be adapted to the needs of individual students, based on assessment;
- includes alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, and the reading of text, as well as systematic phonics instruction.

Non-systematic instruction often neglects vowels, even though knowing vowel letter-sound relationships is a crucial part of knowing the alphabetic system. Non-systematic programs of phonics instruction do not provide practice materials that offer children the opportunity to apply what they are learning about letter-sound relationships. The reading materials these programs do provide for children are selected according to other criteria, such as their interest to children or their literary value.

What else should I look for in programs of phonics instruction?

Programs should acknowledge that systematic phonics instruction is a means to an end. Some phonics programs focus primarily on teaching children a large number of letter-sound relationships. These programs often do not allot enough instructional time to help children learn how to put this knowledge to use in reading actual words, sentences, and texts. Although children need to be taught the major consonant and vowel letter-sound relationships, they also need ample reading and writing activities that allow them to practice using this knowledge.

What kinds of reading practice materials should I look for?

Usually, practice materials are in the form of short books or stories that contain words that provide children with practice in using the specific letter-sound relationships they are learning. Most programs of systematic phonics instruction also include materials for use in practicing writing. For example, children might have activity sheets on which they write the letters and letter combinations they are learning, and then combine these into words, sentences, messages, and their own stories.

Is phonics instruction more effective when students are taught individually, in small groups, or in whole classes?

You can teach phonics effectively to the whole class, to small groups, or to individual students.

The needs of the students in your class and the number of adults working with them determine how you deliver instruction.

Non-systematic programs

Non-systematic programs of phonics instruction

Some programs of instruction do not teach phonics explicitly and systematically.

- ***Literature-based programs*** that emphasize reading and writing activities. Phonics instruction is embedded in these activities, but letter-sound relationships are taught incidentally, usually based on key letters that appear in student reading materials.
- ***Basal reading programs*** that focus on whole-word or meaning-based activities. These programs pay only limited attention to letter-sound relationships and provide little or no instruction in how to blend letters to pronounce words.
- ***Sight-word programs*** that begin by teaching children a sight-word reading vocabulary of from 50 to 100 words. Only after they learn to read these words do children receive instruction in the alphabetic principle.

Further, adding phonics workbooks or phonics activities to these programs of instruction has not been effective. Such “add-ons” confuse rather than help children to read.

Doesn't phonics instruction get in the way of reading comprehension?

Quite the opposite is true. Because systematic phonics instruction helps children learn to identify words, it increases their ability to comprehend what they read. Reading words accurately and automatically enables children to focus on the meaning of text. The research is quite convincing in showing that phonics instruction contributes to comprehension skills rather than inhibiting them.

Does phonics instruction slow down the progress of some children?

Again, the opposite is true. Phonics instruction contributes to growth in the reading of most children. It is important, however, to acknowledge that children vary greatly in the knowledge of reading that they bring to school. For phonics instruction to support the reading progress of all of your students, it is important to work in flexible instructional groups and to pace instruction to maximize student progress.

How does systematic and explicit phonics instruction affect spelling?

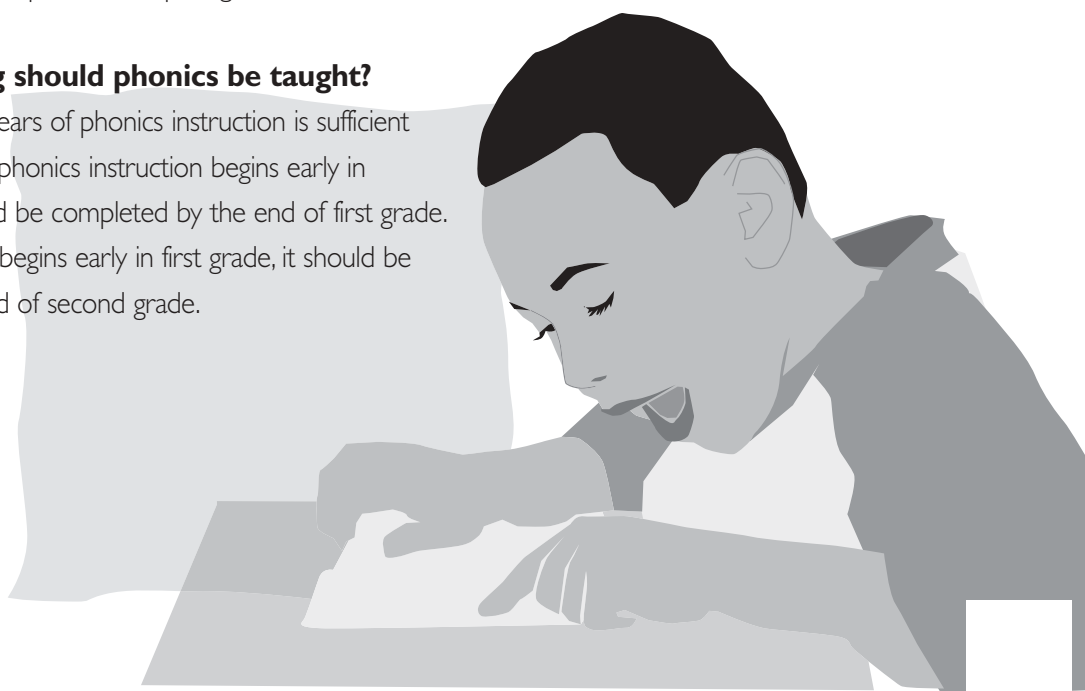
Systematic programs of phonics instruction produce more growth in spelling among kindergarten and first-grade students than non-systematic or no phonics programs. However, systematic phonics instruction for normally developing and poor readers above first grade does not produce gains in spelling. The reason may be that as students move up in the grades, spelling is less a matter of applying letter-sound relationships and more a matter of combining word parts.

How does systematic and explicit phonics instruction affect the reading and spelling of older students?

Systematic phonics instruction by itself may not be enough to significantly improve the overall reading and spelling performance of readers beyond first grade. The effects of phonics instruction on students in second through sixth grades are limited to improving their word reading and oral text reading skills. The effects do not extend to spelling and reading comprehension. For these students, it is important to emphasize reading fluency and comprehension. In addition, these students also require explicit spelling instruction to improve their spelling.

How long should phonics be taught?

Approximately two years of phonics instruction is sufficient for most students. If phonics instruction begins early in kindergarten, it should be completed by the end of first grade. If phonics instruction begins early in first grade, it should be completed by the end of second grade.



Summing up

Phonics instruction

- helps children learn the relationships between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language.
-

Phonics instruction is important because

- it leads to an understanding of the alphabetic principle—the systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds.
-

Programs of phonics instruction are effective when they are

- **systematic**—the plan of instruction includes a carefully selected set of letter-sound relationships that are organized into a logical sequence.
 - **explicit**—the programs provide teachers with precise directions for the teaching of these relationships.
-

Effective phonics programs provide

- ample opportunities for children to apply what they are learning about letters and sounds to the reading of words, sentences, and stories.
-

Systematic and explicit phonics instruction

- significantly improves children's word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension.
- is most effective when it begins in kindergarten or first grade.





*fluency
instruction*



fluency instruction

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. When fluent readers read silently, they recognize words automatically. They group words quickly to help them gain meaning from what they read. Fluent readers read aloud effortlessly and with expression. Their reading sounds natural, as if they are speaking. Readers who have not yet developed fluency read slowly, word by word. Their oral reading is choppy and plodding.

Fluency is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Because fluent readers do not have to concentrate on decoding the words, they can focus their attention on what the text means. They can make connections among the ideas in the text and between the text and their background knowledge. In other words, fluent readers recognize words and comprehend at the same time. Less fluent readers, however, must focus their attention on figuring out the words, leaving them little attention for understanding the text.

More fluent readers

focus their attention on making connections among the ideas in a text and between these ideas and their background knowledge. Therefore, they are able to focus on comprehension.

Less fluent readers

must focus their attention primarily on decoding individual words. Therefore, they have little attention left for comprehending the text.

Fluency develops gradually over considerable time and through substantial practice. At the earliest stage of reading development, students' oral reading is slow and labored because students are just learning to "break the code"—to attach sounds to letters and to blend letter sounds into recognizable words.

Even when students recognize many words automatically, their oral reading still may be expressionless, not fluent. To read with expression, readers must be able to divide the text into meaningful chunks. These chunks include phrases and clauses. Readers must know to pause appropriately within and at the ends of sentences and when to change emphasis and tone. For example, a reader who lacks fluency may read, probably in a monotone, a line from Bill Martin Jr.'s *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* as if it were a list of words rather than a connected text, pausing at inappropriate places:

**Brown/
bear brown/
bear what/
do/
you see.**

A fluent reader will read the same line as:

**Brown bear!
Brown bear!
What do you see?!**

Fluency is not a stage of development at which readers can read all words quickly and easily. Fluency changes, depending on what readers are reading, their familiarity with the words, and the amount of their practice with reading text. Even very skilled readers may read in a slow, labored manner when reading texts with many unfamiliar words or topics. For example, readers who are usually fluent may not be able to read technical material fluently, such as a textbook about nuclear physics or an article in a medical journal.

A recent large-scale study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that 44% of a representative sample of the nation's fourth graders were low in fluency. The study also found a close relationship between fluency and reading comprehension. Students who scored lower on measures of fluency also scored lower on measures of comprehension, suggesting that fluency is a neglected reading skill in many American classrooms, affecting many students' reading comprehension.

Although some readers may recognize words automatically in isolation or on a list, they may not read the same words fluently when the words appear in sentences in connected text. Instant or automatic word recognition is a necessary, but not sufficient, reading skill. Students who can read words in isolation quickly may not be able to automatically transfer this "speed and accuracy." It is important to provide students with instruction and practice in fluency as they read connected text.

What does scientifically based research tell us about fluency instruction?

Researchers have investigated two major instructional approaches related to fluency. In the first approach, repeated and monitored oral reading (commonly called “repeated reading”), students read passages aloud several times and receive guidance and feedback from the teacher. In the second approach, independent silent reading, students are encouraged to read extensively on their own. Key findings from the scientific research on fluency instruction include the following conclusions about these two approaches that are of particular interest and value to classroom teachers.

Repeated and monitored oral reading improves reading fluency and overall reading achievement.

Students who read and reread passages orally as they receive guidance and/or feedback become better readers. Repeated oral reading substantially improves word recognition, speed, and accuracy as well as fluency. To a lesser but still considerable extent, repeated oral reading also improves reading comprehension. Repeated oral reading improves the reading ability of all students throughout the elementary school years. It also helps struggling readers at higher grade levels.

Traditionally, many teachers have relied primarily on round-robin reading to develop oral fluency. In round-robin reading, students take turns reading parts of a text aloud (though usually not repeatedly). But round-robin reading in itself does not increase fluency. This may be because students only read small amounts of text, and they usually read this small portion only once.

Researchers have found several effective techniques related to repeated oral reading:

- students read and reread a text a certain number of times or until a certain level of fluency is reached. Four rereadings are sufficient for most students; and
- oral reading practice is increased through the use of audiotapes, tutors, peer guidance, or other means.

In addition, some effective repeated oral reading techniques have carefully designed feedback to guide the reader’s performance.

The difference between fluency and automaticity

Although the terms automaticity and fluency often are used interchangeably, they are not the same thing.

Automaticity is the fast, effortless word recognition that comes with a great deal of reading practice. In the early stages of learning to read, readers may be accurate but slow and inefficient at recognizing words. Continued reading practice helps word recognition become more automatic, rapid, and effortless. Automaticity refers only to accurate, speedy word recognition, not to reading with expression. Therefore, automaticity (or automatic word recognition) is necessary, but not sufficient, for fluency.



No research evidence is available currently to confirm that instructional time spent on silent, independent reading with minimal guidance and feedback improves reading fluency and overall reading achievement.

One of the major differences between good and poor readers is the amount of time they spend reading. Many studies have found a strong relationship between reading ability and how much a student reads. On the basis of this evidence, teachers have long been encouraged to promote voluntary reading in the classroom. Teacher-education and reading-education literature often recommends in-class procedures for encouraging students to read on their own, such as Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) or Drop Everything and Read (DEAR).

Research, however, has not yet confirmed whether independent silent reading with minimal guidance or feedback improves reading achievement and fluency. Neither has it proven that more silent reading in the classroom cannot work; its effectiveness without guidance or feedback is as yet unproven. The research suggests that there are more beneficial ways to spend reading instructional time than to have students read independently in the classroom without reading instruction.

Questions you may have about fluency instruction

How can I help my students become more fluent readers?

You can help your students become more fluent readers (1) by providing them with models of fluent reading and (2) by having students repeatedly read passages as you offer guidance. In addition, you can help students improve their fluency by combining reading instruction with opportunities for them to read books that are at their independent level of reading ability.

Model fluent reading, then have students reread the text on their own.

By listening to good models of fluent reading, students learn how a reader's voice can help written text make sense. Read aloud daily to your students. By reading effortlessly and with expression, you are modeling for your students how a fluent reader sounds during reading.

After you model how to read the text, you must have the students reread it. By doing this, the students are engaging in repeated reading. Usually, having students read a text four times is sufficient to improve fluency. Remember, however, that instructional time is limited, and it is the actual time that students are actively engaged in reading that produces reading gains.

Have other adults read aloud to students. Encourage parents or other family members to read aloud to their children at home. The more models of fluent reading the children hear, the better. Of course, hearing a model of fluent reading is not the only benefit of reading aloud to children. Reading to children also increases their knowledge of the world, their vocabulary, their familiarity with written language ("book language"), and their interest in reading.

Have students repeatedly read passages aloud with guidance. The best strategy for developing reading fluency is to provide your students with many opportunities to read the same passage orally several times. To do this, you should first know what to have your students read. Second, you should know how to have your students read aloud repeatedly.

Modeling fluent reading

In the primary grades, you might read aloud from a big book. A big book is an enlarged version of a commercially published book—big enough so that all students can clearly see the text. By pointing to each word as you are reading (using either a pointer or your finger), you can show students where and how you are pausing and how the text shows you when to raise or lower your voice. Occasionally, you can also explain to your students why you are reading in a certain way:

Teacher: Did you hear how I grouped the words "Brown bear/ brown bear"?

That's because the words brown and bear belong together.

And then I paused a little before repeating the words.

Teacher: Did you hear how my voice got louder and more excited right here?

That's because the author put in this exclamation mark (point to it) to show that the speaker was excited or enthusiastic about what she was saying.

Then, have the students practice reading the same text.

*Independent
level text*

Relatively easy text for the reader, with no more than approximately 1 in 20 words difficult for the reader (95% success)

*Instructional
level text*

Challenging but manageable text for the reader, with no more than approximately 1 in 10 words difficult for the reader (90% success)

*Frustration
level text*

Difficult text for the reader, with more than 1 in 10 words difficult for the reader (less than 90% success)

What students should read. Fluency develops as a result of many opportunities to practice reading with a high degree of success. Therefore, your students should practice orally rereading text that is reasonably easy for them—that is, text containing mostly words that they know or can decode easily. In other words, the texts should be at the students' independent reading level. A text is at students' independent reading level if they can read it with about 95% accuracy, or misread only about 1 of every 20 words. If the text is more difficult, students will focus so much on word recognition that they will not have an opportunity to develop fluency.

The text your students practice rereading orally should also be relatively short—probably 50–200 words, depending on the age of the students. You should also use a variety of reading materials, including stories, nonfiction, and poetry. Poetry is especially well suited to fluency practice because poems for children are often short and they contain rhythm, rhyme, and meaning, making practice easy, fun, and rewarding.

How to have your students read aloud repeatedly. There are several ways that your students can practice orally rereading text, including student-adult reading, choral (or unison) reading, tape-assisted reading, partner reading, and readers' theatre.

Student-adult reading. In student-adult reading, the student reads one-on-one with an adult. The adult can be you, a parent, a classroom aide, or a tutor. The adult reads the text first, providing the students with a model of fluent reading. Then the student reads the same passage to the adult with the adult providing assistance and encouragement. The student rereads the passage until the reading is quite fluent. This should take approximately three to four rereadings.

Choral reading. In choral, or unison, reading, students read along as a group with you (or another fluent adult reader). Of course, to do so, students must be able to see the same text that you are reading. They might follow along as you read from a big book, or they might read from their own copy of the book you are reading. For choral reading, choose a book that is not too long and that you think is at the independent reading level of most students. Patterned or predictable books are particularly useful for choral reading, because their repetitious style invites students to join in. Begin by reading the book aloud as you model fluent reading.

Then reread the book and invite students to join in as they recognize the words you are reading. Continue rereading the book, encouraging students to read along as they are able. Students should read the book with you three to five times total (though not necessarily on the same day). At this time, students should be able to read the text independently.

Tape-assisted reading. In tape-assisted reading, students read along in their books as they hear a fluent reader read the book on an audiotape. For tape-assisted reading, you need a book at a student's independent reading level and a tape recording of the book read by a fluent reader at about 80–100 words per minute. The tape should not have sound effects or music. For the first reading, the student should follow along with the tape, pointing to each word in her or his book as the reader reads it. Next, the student should try to read aloud along with the tape. Reading along with the tape should continue until the student is able to read the book independently, without the support of the tape.

Partner reading. In partner reading, paired students take turns reading aloud to each other. For partner reading, more fluent readers can be paired with less fluent readers. The stronger reader reads a paragraph or page first, providing a model of fluent reading. Then the less fluent reader reads the same text aloud. The stronger student gives help with word recognition and provides feedback and encouragement to the less fluent partner. The less fluent partner rereads the passage until he or she can read it independently. Partner reading need not be done with a more and less fluent reader. In another form of partner reading, children who read at the same level are paired to reread a story that they have received instruction on during a teacher-guided part of the lesson. Two readers of equal ability can practice rereading after hearing the teacher read the passage.

*Activities
for repeated
oral reading
practice*

Student–adult reading—reading one-on-one with an adult, who provides a model of fluent reading, helps with word recognition, and offers feedback.

Choral reading—reading aloud simultaneously in a group.

Tape-assisted reading—reading aloud simultaneously or as an echo with an audio-taped model.

Partner reading—reading aloud with a more fluent partner (or with a partner of equal ability) who provides a model of fluent reading, helps with word recognition, and provides feedback.

Readers' theatre—the rehearsing and performing before an audience of a dialogue-rich script derived from a book.

Procedure for calculating words correct per minute
One-minute reading: Total words read-errors = words correct per minute

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Select two or three brief passages from a grade-level basal text or other grade-level material (regardless of students' instructional levels).2. Have individual students read each passage aloud for exactly one minute.3. Count the total number of words the student read for each passage. Compute the average number of words read per minute.4. Count the number of errors the student made on each passage. Compute the average number of errors per minute.5. Subtract the average number of errors read per minute from the average total number of words read per minute. The result is the average number of words correct per minute (WCPM). | <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Repeat the procedure several times during the year. Graphing students' WCPM throughout the year easily captures their reading growth.7. Compare the results with published norms or standards to determine whether students are making suitable progress in their fluency. For example, according to one published norm, students should be reading approximately 60 words per minute correctly by the end of first grade, 90–100 words per minute correctly by the end of second grade, and approximately 114 words per minute correctly by the end of third grade. |
|---|--|

Readers' theatre. In readers' theatre, students rehearse and perform a play for peers or others. They read from scripts that have been derived from books that are rich in dialogue. Students play characters who speak lines or a narrator who shares necessary background information. Readers' theatre provides readers with a legitimate reason to reread text and to practice fluency. Readers' theatre also promotes cooperative interaction with peers and makes the reading task appealing.

What should I do about silent, independent reading in the classroom?

Reading fluency growth is greatest when students are working directly with you. Therefore, you should use most of your allocated reading instruction time for direct teaching of reading skills and strategies. Although silent, independent reading may be a way to increase fluency and reading achievement, it should not be used in place of direct instruction in reading.

Direct instruction is especially important for readers who are struggling. Readers who have not yet attained fluency are not likely to make effective and efficient use of silent, independent reading time. For these students, independent reading takes time away from needed reading instruction.

Rather than allocating instructional time for independent reading in the classroom, encourage your students to read more outside of school. They can read with an adult or other family member. Or, they can read on their own with books at their independent reading level. Of course, students might also read on their own during independent work time in the classroom—for example, as another small group is receiving reading instruction, or after they have completed one activity and are waiting for a new activity to begin.

When should fluency instruction begin? When should it end?

Fluency instruction is useful when students are not automatic at recognizing the words in their texts. How can you tell when students are not automatic? There is a strong indication that a student needs fluency instruction:

- if you ask the student to read orally from a text that he or she has not practiced; and the student makes more than ten percent word recognition errors;
- if the student cannot read orally with expression; or
- if the student's comprehension is poor for the text that she or he reads orally.

Is increasing word recognition skills sufficient for developing fluency?

Isolated word recognition is a necessary but not sufficient condition for fluent reading. Throughout much of the twentieth century, it was widely assumed that fluency was the result of word recognition proficiency. Instruction, therefore, focused primarily on the development of word recognition. In recent years, however, research has shown that fluency is a separate component of reading that can be developed through instruction.

Having students review and rehearse word lists (for example, by using flash cards) may improve their ability to recognize the words in isolation, but this ability may not transfer to words presented in actual texts. Developing reading fluency in texts must be developed systematically.

Should I assess fluency? If so, how?

You should formally and informally assess fluency regularly to ensure that your students are making appropriate progress. The most informal assessment is simply listening to students read aloud and making a judgment about their progress in fluency. You should, however, also include more formal measures of fluency. For example, the student's reading rate should be faster than 90 words a minute, the student should be able to read orally with expression, and the student should be able to comprehend what is read while reading orally.

Probably the easiest way to formally assess fluency is to take timed samples of students' reading and to compare their performance (number of words read correctly per minute) with published oral reading fluency norms or standards.

Monitoring your students' progress in reading fluency will help you determine the effectiveness of your instruction and set instructional goals. Also, seeing their fluency growth reflected in the graphs you keep can motivate students.

Other procedures that have been used for measuring fluency include Informal Reading Inventories (IRIs), miscue analysis, and running records. The purpose of these procedures, however, is to identify the kinds of word recognition problems students may have, not to measure fluency. Also, these procedures are quite time-consuming. Simpler measures of speed and accuracy, such as calculating words read correctly per minute, are more appropriate for monitoring fluency.

Summing up

Fluency is

- the ability to read a text accurately and quickly.

Fluency is important because

- it frees students to understand what they read.

Reading fluency can be developed

- by modeling fluent reading
- by having students engage in repeated oral reading.

Monitoring student progress in reading fluency

- is useful in evaluating instruction and setting instructional goals
- can be motivating to students.







*vocabulary
instruction*



vocabulary instruction

Vocabulary refers to the words we must know to communicate effectively. In general, vocabulary can be described as oral vocabulary or reading vocabulary. Oral vocabulary refers to words that we use in speaking or recognize in listening. Reading vocabulary refers to words we recognize or use in print.

Vocabulary plays an important part in learning to read. As beginning readers, children use the words they have heard to make sense of the words they see in print. Consider, for example, what happens when a beginning reader comes to the word **dig** in a book. As she begins to figure out the sounds represented by the letters **d, i, g**, the reader recognizes that the sounds make up a very familiar word that she has heard and said many times. Beginning readers have a much more difficult time reading words that are not already part of their oral vocabulary.

Vocabulary also is very important to reading comprehension. Readers cannot understand what they are reading without knowing what most of the words mean. As children learn to read more advanced texts, they must learn the meaning of new words that are not part of their oral vocabulary.

Types of vocabulary

Researchers often refer to four types of vocabulary

listening vocabulary—the words we need to know to understand what we hear.

speaking vocabulary—the words we use when we speak.

reading vocabulary—the words we need to know to understand what we read.

writing vocabulary—the words we use in writing.

What does scientifically based research tell us about vocabulary instruction?

The scientific research on vocabulary instruction reveals that (1) most vocabulary is learned indirectly, and (2) some vocabulary must be taught directly. The following conclusions about indirect vocabulary learning and direct vocabulary instruction are of particular interest and value to classroom teachers:

Children learn the meanings of most words indirectly, through everyday experiences with oral and written language.

Children learn word meanings indirectly in three ways:

They engage daily in oral language.

Young children learn word meanings through conversations with other people, especially adults. As they engage in these conversations, children often hear adults repeat words several times. They also may hear adults use new and interesting words. The more oral language experiences children have, the more word meanings they learn.

They listen to adults read to them.

Children learn word meanings from listening to adults read to them. Reading aloud is particularly helpful when the reader pauses during reading to define an unfamiliar word and, after reading, engages the child in a conversation about the book. Conversations about books help children to learn new words and concepts and to relate them to their prior knowledge and experience.

They read extensively on their own.

Children learn many new words by reading extensively on their own. The more children read on their own, the more words they encounter and the more word meanings they learn.

Indirect vocabulary learning

Students learn vocabulary indirectly when they hear and see words used in many different contexts—for example, through conversations with adults, through being read to, and through reading extensively on their own.

Direct vocabulary learning

Students learn vocabulary directly when they are explicitly taught both individual words and word-learning strategies. Direct vocabulary instruction aids reading comprehension.

SPECIFIC WORD
INSTRUCTION

WORD LEARNING
INSTRUCTION

Although a great deal of vocabulary is learned indirectly, some vocabulary should be taught directly.

Direct instruction helps students learn difficult words, such as words that represent complex concepts that are not part of the students' everyday experiences. Direct instruction of vocabulary relevant to a given text leads to better reading comprehension.

Direct instruction includes:

- (1) *providing students with specific word instruction; and*
- (2) *teaching students word-learning strategies.*

Specific word instruction

Specific word instruction, or teaching individual words, can deepen students' knowledge of word meanings. In-depth knowledge of word meanings can help students understand what they are hearing or reading. It also can help them use words accurately in speaking and writing.

In particular:

Teaching specific words before reading helps both vocabulary learning and reading comprehension.

Before students read a text, it is helpful to teach them specific words they will see in the text. Teaching important vocabulary before reading can help students both learn new words and comprehend the text.

Extended instruction that promotes active engagement with vocabulary improves word learning.

Children learn words best when they are provided with instruction over an extended period of time and when that instruction has them work actively with the words.

The more students use new words and the more they use them in different contexts, the more likely they are to learn the words.

Repeated exposure to vocabulary in many contexts aids word learning.

Students learn new words better when they encounter them often and in various contexts.

The more children see, hear, and work with specific words, the better they seem to learn them. When teachers provide extended instruction that promotes active engagement, they give students repeated exposure to new words. When the students read those same words in their texts, they increase their exposure to the new words.

*An example of
classroom
instruction*

Teaching specific words: A teacher plans to have his third-grade class read the novel *Stone Fox*, by John Reynolds Gardiner. In this novel, a young boy enters a dogsled race in hopes of winning prize money to pay the taxes on his grandfather's farm. The teacher knows that understanding the concept of *taxes* is important to understanding the novel's plot. Therefore, before his students begin reading the novel, the teacher may do several things to make sure that they understand what the concept means and why it is important to the story. For example, the teacher may:

- *engage students in a discussion of the concept of taxes; and/or*
- *read a sentence from the book that contains the word taxes and ask students to use context and their prior knowledge to try to figure out what it means.*

To solidify their understanding of the word, the teacher might ask students to use *taxes* in their own sentences.

Extended and active engagement with vocabulary

Word learning strategies

Of course, it is not possible for teachers to provide specific instruction for all the words their students do not know. Therefore, students also need to be able to determine the meaning of words that are new to them but not taught directly to them. They need to develop effective word-learning strategies. Word-learning strategies include: (1) how to use dictionaries and other reference aids to learn word meanings and to deepen knowledge of word meanings; (2) how to use information about word parts to figure out the meanings of words in text; and (3) how to use context clues to determine word meanings.

Using dictionaries and other

reference aids. Students must learn how to use dictionaries, glossaries, and thesauruses to help broaden and deepen their knowledge of words, even though these resources can be difficult to use. The most helpful dictionaries include sentences providing clear examples of word meanings in context.

A first-grade teacher wants to help her students understand the concept of *jobs*, which is part of her social studies curriculum. Over a period of time, the teacher engages students in exercises in which they work repeatedly with the meaning of the concept of *jobs*. The students have many opportunities to see and actively use the word in various contexts that reinforce its meaning.

The teacher begins by asking the students what they already know about jobs and by having them give examples of jobs their parents have. The class might have a discussion about the jobs of different people who work at the school.

The teacher then reads the class a simple book about jobs. The book introduces the idea that different jobs help people meet their needs, and that jobs either provide goods or services. The book does not use the words *goods* and *services*, rather it uses the verbs *makes* and *helps*.

The teacher then asks the students to make up sentences describing their parents' jobs by using the verbs *makes* and *helps* (e.g., "My mother is a doctor. She helps sick people get well.")

Next, the teacher asks students to brainstorm other jobs. Together, they decide whether the jobs are "making jobs" or "helping jobs." The job names are placed under the appropriate headings on a bulletin board. They might also suggest jobs that do not fit neatly into either category.

The teacher might then ask the students to share whether they think they would like to have a making or a helping job when they grow up.

The teacher next asks the students to talk with their parents about jobs. She tells them to try to bring to class two new examples of jobs—one making job and one helping job.

As the students come across different jobs throughout the year (for example, through reading books, on field trips, through classroom guests), they can add the jobs to the appropriate categories on the bulletin board.



Repeated exposure to words: A second-grade class is reading a biography of Benjamin Franklin. The biography discusses Franklin’s important role as a scientist. The teacher wants to make sure that her students understand the meaning of the words *science* and *scientist*, both because the words are important to understanding the biography and because they are obviously very useful words to know in school and in everyday life.

At every opportunity, therefore, the teacher draws her students’ attention to the words. She points out the words *scientist* and *science* in textbooks and reading selections, particularly in her science curriculum. She has students use the words in their own writing, especially during science instruction.

She also asks them to listen for and find in print the words as they are used outside of the classroom—in newspapers, magazines, at museums, in television shows or movies, or the Internet.

Then, as they read the biography, she discusses with students in what ways Benjamin Franklin was a scientist and what science meant in his time.

*An example of
classroom
instruction*

Using word parts. Knowing some common prefixes and suffixes (affixes), base words, and root words can help students learn the meanings of many new words. For example, if students learn just the four most common prefixes in English (un-, re-, in-, dis-), they will have important clues about the meaning of about two thirds of all English words that have prefixes. Prefixes are relatively easy to learn because they have clear meanings (for example, un- means not and re- means again); they are usually spelled the same way from word to word; and, of course, they always occur at the beginnings of words.

Learning suffixes can be more challenging than learning prefixes. This is because some suffixes have more abstract meanings than do prefixes. For example, learning that the suffix -ness means “the state or quality of” might not help students figure out the meaning of kindness. Other suffixes, however, are more helpful.

*An example of
classroom
instruction*

Using dictionaries and other reference aids:

As his class reads a text, a second-grade teacher discovers that many of his students do not know the meaning of the word *board*, as in the sentence, “The children were waiting to board the buses.” The teacher demonstrates how to find *board* in the classroom dictionary, showing students that there are four different definitions for the word. He reads the definitions one at a time, and the class discusses whether each definition would fit the context of the sentence. The students easily eliminate the inappropriate definitions of *board*, and settle on the definition, “to get on a train, an airplane, a bus, or a ship.”

The teacher next has students substitute the most likely definition for *board* in the original sentence to verify that it is “The children were waiting to get on the buses” that makes the best sense.



For example, *-less*, which means “without” (hopeless, thoughtless); and *-ful*, which means “full of” (hopeful, thoughtful). Latin and Greek word roots are found commonly in content-area school subjects, especially in the subjects of science and social studies. As a result, Latin and Greek word parts form a large proportion of the new vocabulary that students encounter in their content-area textbooks. Teachers should teach the word roots as they occur in the texts students read. Furthermore, teachers should teach primarily those root words that students are likely to see often.

Word parts

Word parts include *affixes* (prefixes and suffixes), *base words*, and *word roots*.

Affixes are word parts that are “fixed to” either the beginnings of words (prefixes) or the ending of words (suffixes). The word *disrespectful* has two affixes, a prefix (*dis-*) and a suffix (*-ful*).

Base words are words from which many other words are formed.

For example, many words can be formed from the base word *migrate*: *migration*, *migrant*, *immigration*, *immigrant*, *migrating*, *migratory*.

Word roots are the words from other languages that are the origin of many English words. About 60% of all English words have Latin or Greek origins.

Using word parts:

- A second-grade teacher wants to teach her students how to use the base word *play* as a way to help them think about the meanings of new words they will encounter in reading. To begin, she has students brainstorm all the words or phrases they can think of that are related to *play*. The teacher records their suggestions: *player*, *playful*, *playpen*, *ballplayer*, and *playing field*. Then she has the class discuss the meaning of each of their proposed words and how it relates to *play*.
- A third-grade teacher identifies the base word *note*. He then sets up a “word wall,” and writes the word *note* at the top of the wall. As his students read, the teacher has them look for words that are related to *note* and add them to the wall. Throughout their reading, they gradually add to the wall the words *notebook*, *notation*, *noteworthy*, and *notable*.

An example of
classroom
instruction

Using context clues.

Context clues are hints about the meaning of an unknown word that are provided in the words, phrases, and sentences that surround the word. Context clues include definitions, restatements, examples, or descriptions. Because students learn most word meanings indirectly, or from context, it is important that they learn to use context clues effectively.

Not all contexts are helpful, however. Some contexts give little information about a word’s meaning. An example of an unhelpful context is the sentence, “We heard the back door open, and then recognized the buoyant footsteps of Uncle Larry.” A number of possible meanings of buoyant could fit this context, including heavy, lively, noisy, familiar, dragging, plodding, and so on. Instruction in using context clues as a word-learning strategy should include the idea that some contexts are more helpful than others.

An example of
classroom
instruction

Using context clues: In a third-grade class, the teacher models how to use context clues to determine word meanings as follows:

Student (reading the text): When the cat pounced on the dog, the dog jumped up, yelping, and knocked over a lamp, which crashed to the floor. The animals ran past Tonia, tripping her. She fell to the floor and began sobbing. Tonia’s brother Felix yelled at the animals to stop. As the noise and confusion mounted, Mother hollered upstairs, “What’s all that *commotion*?”

Teacher: The context of the paragraph helps us determine what *commotion* means. There’s yelping and crashing, sobbing, and yelling. And then the last sentence says, “as the noise and confusion mounted.” The author’s use of the words *noise* and *confusion* gives us a very strong clue as to what *commotion* means. In fact, the author is really giving us a definition there, because *commotion* means something that’s noisy and confusing—a disturbance. Mother was right; there was definitely a *commotion*!



Questions you may have about vocabulary instruction

How can I help my students learn words indirectly?

You can encourage indirect learning of vocabulary in two main ways. First, read aloud to your students, no matter what grade you teach. Students of all ages can learn words from hearing texts of various kinds read to them. Reading aloud works best when you discuss the selection before, during, and after you read. Talk with students about new vocabulary and concepts and help them relate the words to their prior knowledge and experiences.

The second way to promote indirect learning of vocabulary is to encourage students to read extensively on their own. Rather than allocating instructional time for independent reading in the classroom, however, encourage your students to read more outside of school. Of course, your students also can read on their own during independent work time in the classroom—for example, while you teach another small group or after students have completed one activity and are waiting for a new activity to begin.

What words should I teach?

You won't be able to directly teach your students *all* the words in a text that they might not already know. In fact, there are several reasons why you should *not* directly teach all unknown words.

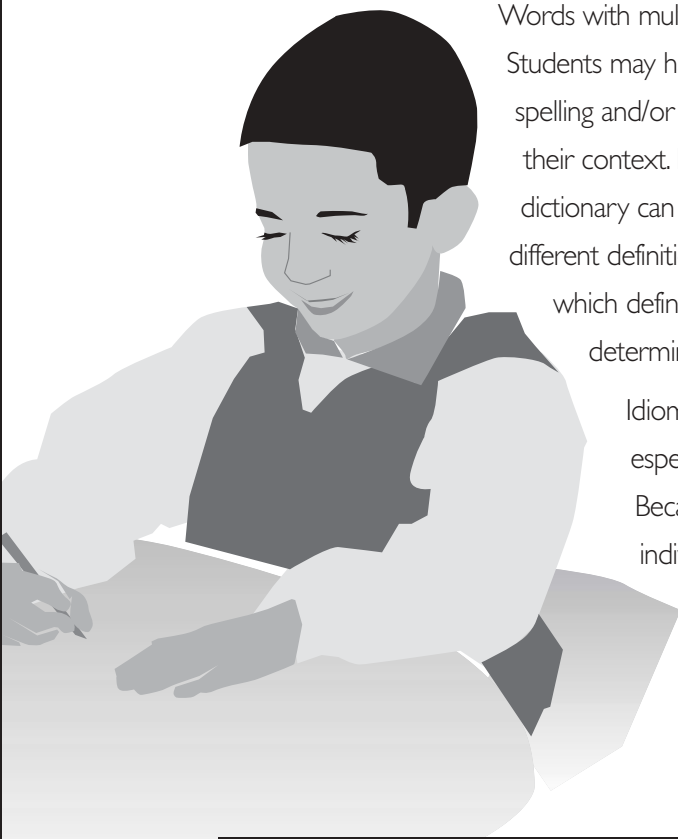
- The text may have a great many words that are unknown to students—too many for direct instruction.
- Direct vocabulary instruction can take a lot of class time—time that you might better spend on having your students read.
- Your students can understand most texts without knowing the meaning of every word in the text.
- Your students need opportunities to use word-learning strategies to learn on their own the meanings of unknown words.

You will probably to be able to teach thoroughly only a few new words (perhaps eight or ten) per week, so you need to choose the words you teach carefully. Focus on teaching three types of words:

Important words. When you teach words before students read a text, directly teach those words that are important for understanding a concept or the text. Your students might not know several other words in the selection, but you will not have time to teach them all. Of course, you should prepare your students to use word-learning strategies to figure out the meanings of other words in the text.

Useful words. Teach words that students are likely to see and use again and again. For example, it is probably more useful for students to learn the word *fragment* than the word *fractal*; likewise, the word *revolve* is more useful than the word *gyrate*.

Difficult words. Provide some instruction for words that are particularly difficult for your students.



Words with multiple meanings are particularly challenging for students. Students may have a hard time understanding that words with the same spelling and/or pronunciation can have different meanings, depending on their context. Looking up words with multiple meanings in the dictionary can cause confusion for students. They see a number of different definitions listed, and they often have a difficult time deciding which definition fits the context. You will have to help students determine which definition they should choose.

Idiomatic expressions also can be difficult for students, especially for students who are English language learners. Because idiomatic expressions do not mean what the individual words usually mean, you often will need to explain to students expressions such as “hard hearted,” “a chip off the old block,” “drawing a blank,” or “get the picture.”

MULTIPLE-MEANING WORDS THAT CAN BE DIFFICULT FOR STUDENTS:	EXAMPLES
Words that are spelled the same but are pronounced differently	<p>sow (a female pig); sow (to plant seeds)</p> <p>bow (a knot with loops); bow (the front of a ship)</p>
Words that are spelled and pronounced the same, but have different meanings	<p>mail (letters, cards, and packages); mail (a type of armor)</p> <p>ray (a narrow beam of light); ray (a type of fish);</p> <p>ray (part of a line)</p>

How well do my students need to “know” vocabulary words?

Students do not either *know* or *not know* words. Rather, they know words to varying degrees. They may never have seen or heard a word before. They may have heard or seen it, but have only a vague idea of what it means. Or they may be very familiar with the meaning of a word and be able to use it accurately in their own speech and writing. These three levels of word knowledge are called **unknown, acquainted, and established.**

As they read, students can usually get by with some words at the unknown or acquainted levels. If students are to understand the text fully, however, they need to have an established level of knowledge for most of the words that they read.

LEVEL OF WORD KNOWLEDGE	DEFINITION
Unknown	<i>The word is completely unfamiliar and its meaning is unknown.</i>
Acquainted	<i>The word is somewhat familiar; the student has some idea of its basic meaning.</i>
Established	<i>The word is very familiar; the student can immediately recognize its meaning and use the word correctly.</i>

Are there different types of word learning?

If so, are some types of learning more difficult than others?

Four different kinds of word learning have been identified:

- learning a new meaning for a known word;
- learning the meaning for a new word representing a known concept;
- learning the meaning of a new word representing an unknown concept; and
- clarifying and enriching the meaning of a known word.

These types vary in difficulty. One of the most common, yet challenging, is the third type: learning the meaning of a new word representing an unknown concept. Much of learning in the content areas involves this type of word learning. As students learn about **deserts, hurricanes, and immigrants**, they may be learning both new concepts and new words. Learning words and concepts in science, social studies, and mathematics is even more challenging because each major concept often is associated with many other new concepts. For example, the concept **deserts** is often associated with other concepts that may be unfamiliar, such as cactus, plateau, and mesa.

TYPE OF WORD LEARNING	EXPLANATION
<p><i>Learning a new meaning for a known word</i></p>	<p>The student has the word in her oral or reading vocabulary, but she is learning a new meaning for it. For example, the student knows what a branch is, and is learning in social studies about both branches of rivers and branches of government.</p>
<p><i>Learning the meaning for a new word representing a known concept</i></p>	<p>The student is familiar with the concept but he does not know the particular word for that concept. For example, the student has had a lot of experience with baseballs and globes, but does not know that they are examples of spheres.</p>
<p><i>Learning the meaning of a new word representing an unknown concept</i></p>	<p>The student is not familiar with either the concept or the word that represents that concept, and she must learn both. For example, the student may not be familiar with either the process or the word photosynthesis.</p>
<p><i>Clarifying and enriching the meaning of a known word</i></p>	<p>The student is learning finer, more subtle distinctions, or connotations, in the meaning and usage of words. For example, he is learning the differences between running, jogging, trotting, dashing, and sprinting.</p>

What else can I do to help my students develop vocabulary?

Another way you can help your students develop vocabulary is to foster *word consciousness*—an awareness of and interest in words, their meanings, and their power. Word-conscious students know many words and use them well. They enjoy words and are eager to learn new words—and they know *how* to learn them.

You can help your students develop word consciousness in several ways. Call their attention to the way authors choose words to convey particular meanings. Encourage students to play with words by engaging in word play, such as puns or palindromes. Help them research a word's origin or history. You can also encourage them to search for examples of a word's usage in their everyday lives.

Summing up

Vocabulary refers to

- the words we must know to communicate effectively.
- **Oral** vocabulary refers to words that we use in speaking or recognize in listening.
- **Reading** vocabulary refers to words we recognize or use in print.

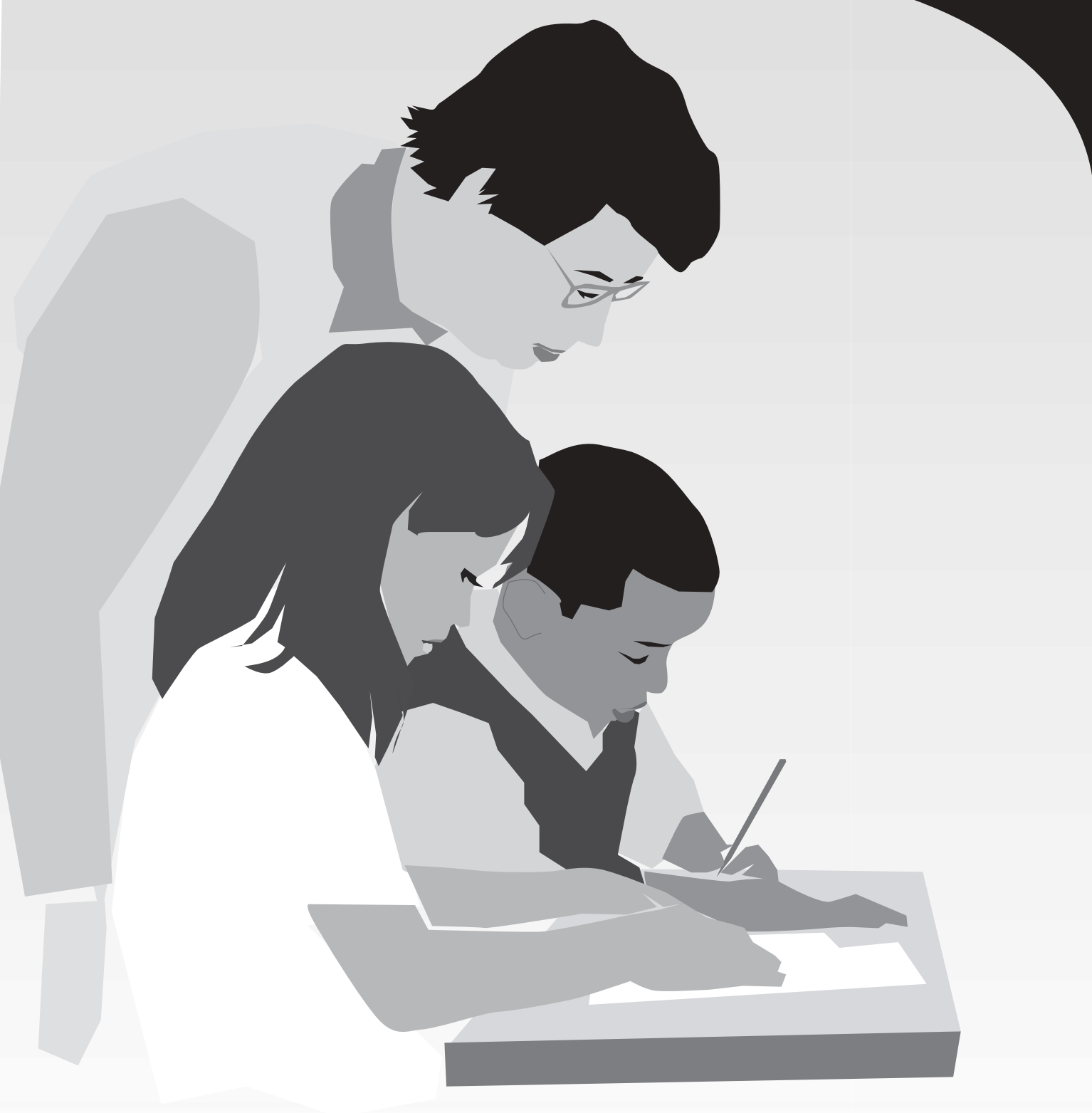
Vocabulary is important because

- beginning readers use their oral vocabulary to make sense of the words they see in print.
- readers must know what most of the words mean before they can understand what they are reading.

Vocabulary can be developed

- **indirectly**, when students engage daily in oral language, listen to adults read to them, and read extensively on their own.
- **directly**, when students are explicitly taught both individual words and word learning strategies.





*text
comprehension
instruction*



text comprehension instruction

Comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading.

As they read, good readers are both purposeful and active.

Good readers are purposeful. Good readers have a purpose for reading. They may read to find out how to use a food processor, read a guidebook to gather information about national parks, read a textbook to satisfy the requirements of a course, read a magazine for entertainment, or read a classic novel to experience the pleasures of great literature.

Good readers are active. Good readers think actively as they read. To make sense of what they read, good readers engage in a complicated process. Using their experiences and knowledge of the world, their knowledge of vocabulary and language structure, and their knowledge of reading strategies (or plans), good readers make sense of the text and know how to get the most out of it. They know when they have problems with understanding and how to resolve these problems as they occur.

Research over 30 years has shown that instruction in comprehension can help students understand what they read, remember what they read, and communicate with others about what they read.

What does scientifically based research tell us about effective text comprehension instruction?

The scientific research on text comprehension instruction reveals important information about what students should be taught about text comprehension and how it should be taught. The following key findings are of particular interest and value to classroom teachers.

Text comprehension can be improved by instruction that helps readers use specific comprehension strategies.

Comprehension strategies are conscious plans—sets of steps that good readers use to make sense of text. Comprehension strategy instruction helps students become purposeful, active readers who are in control of their own reading comprehension.

The following six strategies appear to have a firm scientific basis for improving text comprehension.

Monitoring comprehension. Students who are good at monitoring their comprehension know when they understand what they read and when they do not. They have strategies to “fix up” problems in their understanding as the problems arise. Research shows that instruction, even in the early grades, can help students become better at monitoring their comprehension.

Comprehension monitoring instruction teaches students to

- be aware of what they **do** understand,
- identify what they **do not** understand, and
- use appropriate “fix-up” strategies to resolve problems in comprehension.

Meta-cognition

Metacognition can be defined as “thinking about thinking.” Good readers use metacognitive strategies to think about and have control over their reading.

Before reading, they might clarify their purpose for reading and preview the text. During reading, they might monitor their understanding, adjusting their reading speed to fit the difficulty of the text and “fixing up” any comprehension problems they have. After reading, they check their understanding of what they read.

Comprehension monitoring, a critical part of metacognition, has received a great deal of attention in the reading research.

Students may use several comprehension monitoring strategies.

- Identify where the difficulty occurs ("I don't understand the second paragraph on page 76:").
- Identify what the difficulty is ("I don't get what the author means when she says, 'Arriving in America was a milestone in my grandmother's life.'").
- Restate the difficult sentence or passage in their own words ("Oh, so the author means that coming to America was a very important event in her grandmother's life:").
- Look back through the text ("The author talked about Mr. McBride in Chapter 2, but I don't remember much about him. Maybe if I reread that chapter, I can figure out why he's acting this way now:").
- Look forward in the text for information that might help them to resolve the difficulty. ("The text says, 'The groundwater may form a stream or pond or create a wetland. People can also bring groundwater to the surface.' Hmm, I don't understand how people can do that . . . Oh, the next section is called 'Wells.' I'll read this section to see if it tells how they do it:").

Using graphic and semantic organizers. Graphic organizers illustrate concepts and interrelationships among concepts in a text, using diagrams or other pictorial devices. Graphic organizers are known by different names, such as maps, webs, graphs, charts, frames, or clusters. Semantic organizers (also called semantic maps or semantic webs) are graphic organizers that look somewhat like a spider web. In a semantic organizer, lines connect a central concept to a variety of related ideas and events.



Regardless of the label, graphic organizers can help readers focus on concepts and how they are related to other concepts. Graphic organizers help students read to learn from informational text in the content areas, such as science and social studies textbooks and trade books. Used with informational text, graphic organizers can help students see how concepts fit common text structures. Graphic organizers are also used with narrative text, or stories, as story maps.

Graphic organizers can:

- help students focus on text structure as they read;
- provide students with tools they can use to examine and visually represent relationships in a text; and
- help students write well-organized summaries of a text.

Answering questions. Teachers have long used questions to guide and monitor students' learning. Research shows that teacher questioning strongly supports and advances students' learning from reading. Questions appear to be effective for improving learning from reading because they:

- give students a purpose for reading;
- focus students' attention on what they are to learn;
- help students to think actively as they read;
- encourage students to monitor their comprehension; and
- help students to review content and relate what they have learned to what they already know.

Question-answering instruction encourages students to learn to answer questions better and, therefore, to learn more as they read. One type of question-answering instruction simply teaches students to look back in the text to find answers to questions that they cannot answer after the initial reading. Another type helps students understand question-answer relationships—the relationships between questions and where the answers to those questions are found. In this instruction, readers learn to answer questions that require an understanding of information that is

- text explicit (stated explicitly in a single sentence);
- text implicit (implied by information presented in two or more sentences); or
- scriptal (not found in the text at all, but part of the reader's prior knowledge or experience).

Generating questions. Teaching students to ask their own questions improves their active processing of text and their comprehension. By generating questions, students become aware of whether they can answer the questions and if they understand what they are reading. Students learn to ask themselves questions that require them to integrate information from different segments of text. For example, students can be taught to ask main idea questions that relate to important information in a text.

Examples of question-answer relationships

Text: (from *The Skirt*, by Gary Soto)

After stepping off the bus, Miata Ramirez turned around and gasped, “Ay!” The school bus lurched, coughed a puff of stinky exhaust, and made a wide turn at the corner. The driver strained as he worked the steering wheel like the horns of a bull.

Miata yelled for the driver to stop. She started running after the bus. Her hair whipped against her shoulders. A large book bag tugged at her arm with each running step, and bead earrings jingled as they banged against her neck.

“My skirt!” she cried loudly. “Stop!”

Question: Did Miata try to get the driver to stop?

Answer: Yes.

Question-Answer Relationship (Text explicit, because the information is given in one sentence):

“Miata yelled for the driver to stop.”

Question: Why did Miata want the driver to stop?

Answer: She suddenly remembered that she had left a skirt on the bus.

Question-Answer Relationship (Text implicit, because the information must be inferred from different parts of the text):

Miata is crying “My skirt!” as she is trying to get the driver to stop.

Question: Was the skirt important to Miata?

Answer: Yes.

Question-Answer Relationship (Scriptal, because the information is not contained in the text, but must be drawn from the reader’s prior knowledge): She probably would not have tried so hard to get the driver to stop if the skirt were not important to her.



Recognizing story structure. Story structure refers to the way the content and events of a story are organized into a plot. Students who can recognize story structure have greater appreciation, understanding, and memory for stories. In story structure instruction, students learn to identify the categories of content (setting, initiating events, internal reactions, goals, attempts, and outcomes) and how this content is organized into a plot. Often, students learn to recognize story structure through the use of story maps. Story maps, a type of graphic organizer, show the sequence of events in simple stories. Instruction in the content and organization of stories improves students' comprehension and memory of stories.

Summarizing. A summary is a synthesis of the important ideas in a text. Summarizing requires students to determine what is important in what they are reading, to condense this information, and to put it into their own words. Instruction in summarizing helps students:

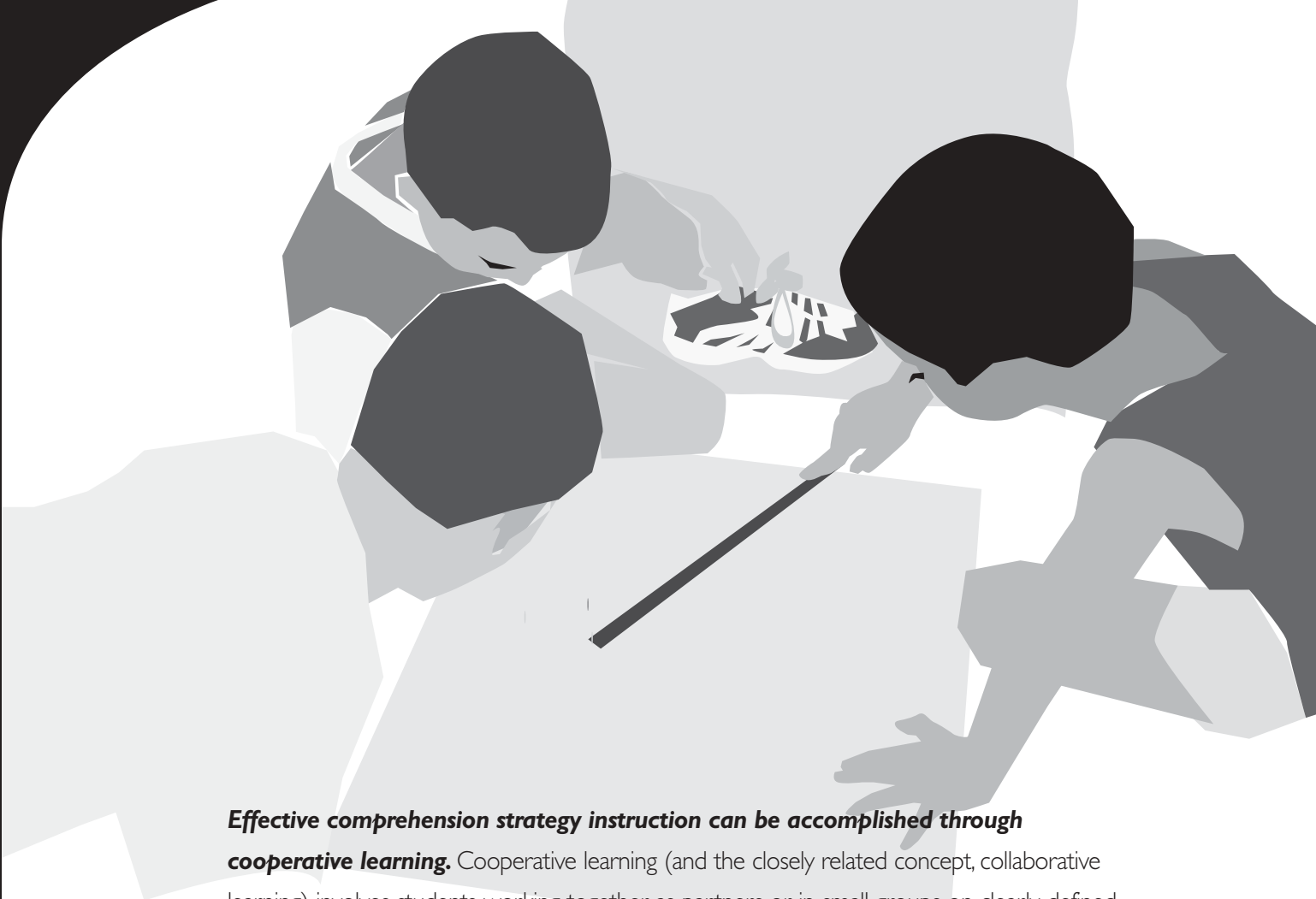
- identify or generate main ideas;
- connect the main or central ideas;
- eliminate redundant and unnecessary information; and
- remember what they read.

Students can be taught to use comprehension strategies.

In addition to identifying which comprehension strategies are effective, scientific research provides guidelines for how to teach comprehension strategies.

Effective comprehension strategy instruction is explicit, or direct. Research shows that explicit teaching techniques are particularly effective for comprehension strategy instruction. In explicit instruction, teachers tell readers why and when they should use strategies, what strategies to use, and how to apply them. The steps of explicit instruction typically include direct explanation, teacher modeling ("thinking aloud"), guided practice, and application.

- **Direct explanation.** The teacher explains to students why the strategy helps comprehension and when to apply the strategy.
- **Modeling.** The teacher models, or demonstrates, how to apply the strategy, usually by "thinking aloud" while reading the text that the students are using.
- **Guided practice.** The teacher guides and assists students as they learn how and when to apply the strategy.
- **Application.** The teacher helps students practice the strategy until they can apply it independently.



Effective comprehension strategy instruction can be accomplished through cooperative learning. Cooperative learning (and the closely related concept, collaborative learning) involves students working together as partners or in small groups on clearly defined tasks. Cooperative learning instruction has been used successfully to teach comprehension strategies in content-area subjects. Students work together to understand content-area texts, helping each other learn and apply comprehension strategies. Teachers help students learn to work in groups. Teachers also provide demonstrations of the comprehension strategies and monitor the progress of students.

Effective instruction helps readers use comprehension strategies flexibly and in combination. Although it can be helpful to provide students with instruction in individual comprehension strategies, good readers must be able to coordinate and adjust several strategies to assist comprehension.

Multiple-strategy instruction teaches students how to use strategies flexibly as they are needed to assist their comprehension. In a well-known example of multiple-strategy instruction called “reciprocal teaching,” the teacher and students work together so that the students learn four comprehension strategies:

- asking questions about the text they are reading;
- summarizing parts of the text;
- clarifying words and sentences they don’t understand; and
- predicting what might occur next in the text.

Teachers and students use these four strategies flexibly as they are needed in reading literature and informational texts.

Questions you may have about text comprehension instruction

Is enough known about comprehension strategy instruction for me to implement it in my classroom?

Yes. Scientific study of text comprehension instruction over the past 30 years has suggested instructional approaches that are ready to be implemented in classrooms.

When should text comprehension instruction begin?

Even teachers in the primary grades can begin to build the foundation for reading comprehension. Reading is a complex process that develops over time. Although the basics of reading—word recognition and fluency—can be learned in a few years, reading to learn subject matter does not occur automatically once students have “learned to read.” Teachers should emphasize text comprehension from the beginning, rather than waiting until students have mastered “the basics” of reading. Instruction at all grade levels can benefit from showing students how reading is a process of making sense out of text, or constructing meaning. Beginning readers, as well as more advanced readers, must understand that the ultimate goal of reading is comprehension.

You can highlight meaning in all interactions with text. Talk about the content, whether reading aloud to students or guiding them in reading on their own. Model, or “think aloud,” about your own thinking and understanding as you read. Lead students in a discussion about the meaning of what they are reading. Help students relate the content to their experience and to other texts they have read. Encourage students to ask questions about the text.

Has research identified comprehension strategies other than the six described here?

The six strategies described have received the strongest scientific support. The following strategies, however, have received some support from research. You may want to consider them for use in your classroom.

Making use of prior knowledge. Good readers draw on prior knowledge and experience to help them understand what they are reading. You can help your students make use of their prior knowledge to improve their comprehension. Before your students read, preview the text with them. As part of previewing ask the students what they already know about the content of the selection (for example, the topic, the concept, or the time period). Ask them what they know about the author and what text structure he or she is likely to use. Discuss the important vocabulary used in the text. Show students some pictures or diagrams to prepare them for what they are about to read.



Using mental imagery. Good readers often form mental pictures, or images, as they read. Readers (especially younger readers) who visualize during reading understand and remember what they read better than readers who do not visualize. Help your students learn to form visual images of what they are reading. For example, urge them to picture a setting, character, or event described in the text.

Which comprehension strategies should be taught? When should they be taught?

Comprehension strategies are not ends in themselves; they are means of helping your students understand what they are reading. Help your students learn to use comprehension strategies in natural learning situations—for example, as they read in the content areas. If your students are struggling to identify and remember the main points in a chapter they are reading in their social studies textbook, teach them how to write summaries. Or, if students have read a chapter in their science textbook but are unable to answer questions about the chapter, teach them question-answering strategies. When your students find that using comprehension strategies can help them to learn, they are more likely to be motivated and involved actively in learning.

Keep in mind that not all comprehension strategies work for all types of text. Obviously, you can only teach story structure when students are reading stories, not informational text or poetry.

Summing up

Text comprehension is important because

- comprehension is the reason for reading.

Text comprehension is

- purposeful.
- active.

Text comprehension can be developed

- by teaching comprehension strategies.

Text comprehension strategies can be taught

- through explicit instruction.
- through cooperative learning.
- by helping readers use strategies flexibly and in combination.







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The findings described in this document were drawn from the report of the National Reading Panel, *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction—Reports of the Subgroups*.

A complete copy of the NRP report can be read, downloaded, or ordered at no cost from the NRP website at www.nationalreadingpanel.org.

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