



BEST PRACTICES FOR LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN PRIMARY GRADES

Prepared for Utah Leading through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic Education

March 2019

In the following report, Hanover Research and ULEAD explore universal strategies for reading and literacy instruction at the elementary school level, focusing on Grades K-3.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

On-level reading proficiency by the time of Grade 3 entry is one of—if not the most important—indicator that students will persist to high school graduation and attain postsecondary academic and professional success.¹ Proficient reading at the beginning of Grade 3 is so important that some educators consider students who are not reading on grade level to be in an “academic crisis,” as research shows that “[a] student who can't read on grade level by [Grade 3] is four times less likely to graduate by age 19 than a child who does read proficiently by that time.”² Research also indicates that 88 percent of students who do not earn a diploma struggled with reading in Grade 3.³



READING TO LEARN

Experts emphasize that students must begin applying their literacy skills in new ways following Grade 3. While early elementary school focuses on developing students' literacy skills and ability to read, Grade 4 and beyond require students to apply their acquired reading skills to engage with and learn new content.

The ability to read proficiently is the fulcrum upon which students' success in all aspects of their formal education depends.⁴ Grade 3 reading proficiency proves especially important due to the increasing learning demands placed on students starting in Grade 4. Essentially, students in Grade 3 and lower are “learning to read,” whereas students in Grade 4 and higher are “reading to learn.”⁵ In the latter years of elementary school, students require strong reading skills to understand informational texts in science and social studies, to comprehend word problems in math, and to interpret more subjective language and meanings in language arts.⁶ In fact, “[u]p to half of the printed [Grade 4] curriculum is incomprehensible to students who read below that grade level.”⁷ Thus, students who fail to read proficiently by Grade 3 will encounter tremendous obstacles in their subsequent education and professional careers.⁸

¹ “Grade Level Reading.” National League of Cities. <https://www.nlc.org/grade-level-reading-0>

² [1] Samuels, C.A. “Early Grades Crucial in Path to Reading Proficiency - Education Week.” Education Week, January 2, 2015. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/01/08/early-grades-crucial-in-path-to-reading.html> [2] Sparks, S.D. “Study: Third Grade Reading Predicts Later High School Graduation.” Education Week, April 8, 2011. http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2011/04/the_disquieting_side_effect_of.html?cmp=SOC-SHR-FB

³ “Pre-Kindergarten-Third Grade Literacy.” National Council of State Legislatures, May 24, 2018. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/pre-kindergarten-third-grade-literacy.aspx>

⁴ “Reading Instruction.” American Federation of Teachers. <https://www.aft.org/position/reading-instruction>

⁵ Fiester, L. “Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters.” Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010. p. 9. http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-Early_Warning_Full_Report-2010.pdf

⁶ “K-3 Reading Communications Toolkit.” The Foundation for Excellence in Education. p. 4. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

⁷ Fiester, Op. cit., p. 9.

⁸ “Learning to Read, Reading to Learn: Why Third-Grade Is a Pivotal Year for Mastering Literacy.” Center for Public Education, March 2015. p. 1. http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/system/files/Leading%20to%20Read%20%28Full%20report%29_0.pdf

To provide high-quality support and services to its districts and constituents, Utah Leading through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic Education (ULEAD) is interested in understanding best practices in literacy instruction for primary grades. To support this effort, Hanover Research (Hanover) reviewed current literature and policy guidance on reading instruction in elementary school—particularly in Grades K-3. This report includes two sections:

- **Section I: Principles of Tier 1 Literacy Instruction** examines universal best practices that teachers can use to deliver effective and developmentally-appropriate reading instruction to all students in Grades K-3.
- **Section II: K-3 Literacy Instruction** discusses specific strategies that teachers can use to develop students' core literacy competencies—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—in Grades K-3.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Districts leaders should consider:



Establishing a core literacy program in the elementary grades to focus instruction on developmentally-appropriate skills and create consistency across schools;



Providing professional learning opportunities to teachers to further develop their ability to implement best practices in literacy instruction; and



Investigating scheduling modifications to assess the feasibility of a daily 90-minute block for literacy instruction and providing teachers with sufficient time to plan differentiated activities for Tier 1 literacy instruction.

KEY FINDINGS



Reading instruction for early elementary school students should address phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In particular, schools should adopt a core literacy program focused on these components as the foundation for early literacy instruction. Notably, specific grades within the K-3 spectrum should focus on certain essential components of reading instruction. For instance, students in Kindergarten and Grade 1 should receive instruction in phonemic awareness, but by Grade 2, this should no longer remain a core instructional focus. Comparatively, instruction in fluency should be introduced after Kindergarten, while students in Kindergarten through Grade 3 should receive literacy instruction in phonics, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.



Comprehensive literacy instruction should be direct and explicit to model the strategies and thinking skills used by effective readers. Teachers may model strategies to the whole class, small groups, or individual students, based on needs. Likewise, when delivering direct, explicit instruction, teachers should articulate the precise reasons that a given strategy or skill is useful. Moreover, instruction should be systematic to facilitate logical development of target literacy skills and should be

carefully sequenced to expose students to more basic skills before they encounter or practice more advanced strategies.



Teachers must differentiate their literacy instruction to meet the varied needs, skill sets, and ability levels of diverse learners. Teachers can use assessment and other progress monitoring data to adjust instruction to target students' specific learning goals—whether they are gifted, are English learners, or require additional reading support. Teachers can differentiate through whole group instruction, though dividing students into small groups is more effective depending on the purpose. Small groups allow teachers to assemble students of mixed or similar reading abilities depending on the nature and objectives of instructional activities. Regardless of the composition of small groups or the platform through which differentiation occurs, differentiation allows teachers to alter the instructional time, literacy content, and intensity of scaffolding that students receive based on their reading level.



No singular best method for vocabulary instruction has been identified by research, and teachers should use a combination of indirect and direct vocabulary instruction to build students' literacy skills in the general education classroom. On average, children can learn between two and five new words per day or 750 to 5,000 words per year. However, while direct instruction supports students in learning new vocabulary, students can only learn eight to ten words per week through this method. As such, teachers should also introduce new vocabulary indirectly through daily interactions with students and through songs, books, and other media.



Teachers across Grades K-3 should support students in developing specific strategies and skills to facilitate reading comprehension. Students in early primary grades should have comprehension strategies presented to them in simple terms to facilitate growth in their cognitive abilities to examine and analyze texts. Further, students should have plenty of opportunities for practice, as they will typically need three or more lessons on a given strategy before they can use it independently. In general, both teacher-directed explicit instruction and student-driven activities should focus on applying specific comprehension strategies before, during, and after reading a given text.

SECTION I: PRINCIPLES OF TIER 1 LITERACY INSTRUCTION

In the following section, Hanover and ULEAD examine best practices that teachers can use to deliver effective, developmentally-appropriate reading instruction to all students in Grades K-3.

OVERVIEW OF TIER 1 LITERACY INSTRUCTION

High-quality literacy instruction in elementary school can mitigate and prevent poor reading outcomes for students in secondary school and during postsecondary pursuits. In contrast, students with early reading problems who do not receive high-quality literacy instruction as part of their regular coursework often develop more serious literacy-related difficulties as adolescents.⁹

High-quality Tier 1 literacy instruction helps ensure learning for all students in a given classroom.¹⁰ Importantly, delivery of effective Tier 1 instruction requires sufficient time, which is an especially difficult task considering the multiple competencies and standards that compete for limited class time.¹¹ Expert guidance suggests a 90-minute reading block; however, the appropriate amount of time spent completing Tier 1 reading instruction for K-3 students will depend on the specific needs of a given teacher's students.¹² Specifically, Education Northwest emphasizes that **the use of an uninterrupted, 90-minute literacy block is an effective foundation from which to deliver Tier 1 literacy instruction.**¹³

Seminal reports published by the National Research Council and the National Reading Program in 1998 and 2000, respectively, indicate that **reading instruction for elementary school students should address: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension** (see Figure 1.1 on the following page).¹⁴

⁹ Denton, C.A. "High-Quality Classroom Instruction: Classroom Reading Instruction That Supports Struggling Readers." RTI Action Network. <http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/tieredinstruction/tier1/highquality>

¹⁰ "Page 10: Effective Instruction at Tier 1." IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University. <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/rti03/cresource/q4/p10/>






¹¹ Shanahan, T. "How to Organize Daily Literacy Instruction." Center for Development and Learning, June 4, 2014. <http://www.cdl.org/articles/how-to-organize-daily-literacy-instruction/>

¹² [1] "Frequently Asked Questions about Reading Instruction." Florida Center for Reading Research, Florida State University. <http://www.fcrr.org/Curriculum/curriculumInstructionFaq1.shtm#4> [2] Brown, R. "Allocating Time for Instruction." FastBridge Learning, December 2, 2016. <http://www.fastbridge.org/2016/12/allocating-time-for-instruction/>

¹³ Underwood, S. "What Is the Evidence for an Uninterrupted, 90-Minute Literacy Instruction Block?" Education Northwest, January 2018. p. 6. <http://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/resources/uninterrupted-literacy-block-brief.pdf>

¹⁴ [1] Denton, "High-Quality Classroom Instruction: Classroom Reading Instruction That Supports Struggling Readers," Op. cit. [2] "Five Components of Reading." You for Youth | U.S. Department of Education. <https://y4y.ed.gov/learn/literacy/introduction/five-components-of-reading>

Figure 1.1: Essential Components of Effective Reading Instruction

| COMPONENT | DESCRIPTION |
|--|--|
|  PHONEMIC AWARENESS | Phonemic awareness is recognizing and using individual sounds to create words. It is the understanding that spoken words are made up of individual phonemes and serves as the foundation for spelling and word recognition. ¹⁵ |
|  PHONICS | Phonics is understanding the relationship between written letters and spoken words. Phonics skills allow readers to link sounds with words in print. ¹⁶ |
|  FLUENCY | Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. Reading fluently is to read smoothly and with expression. ¹⁷ |
|  VOCABULARY | Vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings in both oral and print language and in both expressive forms—speaking and writing—and receptive forms—listening and reading. ¹⁸ |
|  COMPREHENSION | Reading comprehension is a complex process of simultaneously extracting, constructing, and understanding meaning while reading text. Students who are effective readers engage in active thinking before they read, while they are reading, and after they read, and this helps them make sense of text. ¹⁹ |

Source: Exceptional Children’s Assistance Center and U.S. Department of Education

Relatedly, the IRIS Center at Vanderbilt University—a U.S. Department of Education-funded organization that develops free online resources to support teachers in supporting students’ learning and behavioral outcomes—recommends that schools adopt a core literacy program focused on these domains or components as the foundation for early literacy instruction. Selection of an effective literacy program is vital in guiding teachers and establishing a foundation from which to design and deliver quality reading instruction. Specifically, schools and districts should identify and adopt core literacy programs that:²⁰

- Organize the scope and sequence of lessons in which specific skills are taught so that teachers do not have to make constant decisions as they progress through a curriculum;
- Create consistency across classrooms, grade levels, schools, and districts;

¹⁵ Text quoted verbatim from “Five Important Components of Reading Instruction.” Exceptional Children’s Assistance Center. p. 1. <https://www.ecac-parentcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Five-Important-Components-of-Reading-Instruction.pdf>

¹⁶ Text quoted verbatim with adaptations from Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁷ Text quoted verbatim from Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁸ Text quoted verbatim from “Vocabulary.” You for Youth | U.S. Department of Education. <https://y4y.ed.gov/learn/literacy/introduction/vocabulary/>

¹⁹ Text quoted verbatim with adaptations from “Comprehension.” You for Youth | U.S. Department of Education. <https://y4y.ed.gov/learn/literacy/introduction/comprehension/>

²⁰ Preceding text adapted and bulleted text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: “Page 3: High-Quality Instruction: Comprehensive Core Reading Program.” IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University. <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/rti03/cresource/q2/p03/#content>

- Provide research-validated materials and strategies for meeting diverse students' needs;
- Build curricula and instructional practices that support students' initial learning as well as the transfer of knowledge and skills to other contexts; and
- Reflect state standards, which identify benchmarks and target instruction at each grade level.

The Utah State Board of Education has emphasized the importance of early literacy instruction for all students with the K-3 Reading Improvement Program. Through this program, schools can access the following resources for their students:²¹

- Early intervention;
- Standards and assessments for testing and monitoring reading competency;
- Optional progress monitoring assessment
- Ongoing professional development;
- Coaching; and
- The use of data to inform instruction.

CONSIDERATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

Though Tier 1 instruction should address the five core components of literacy, variation exists across elementary grades in the focus on these components and the specific skills students should acquire by certain ages or grades. For example, Understood—a collaboration between 15 nonprofits that provides resources to parents of students with disabilities—breaks reading skills down by age rather than grade level (see Figure 1.2 on the following page).²²

²¹ Bullet points were quoted verbatim from: Wiebke, S., J. Thronsen, and D. Suddreth. "K-3 Reading Improvement Program," January 2018. p. 3. <https://schools.utah.gov/file/ca504ef8-bc48-4472-a27c-36b07f9f1129>

²² "Our Story." Understood. <https://www.understood.org/en/about/our-story>

Figure 1.2: Literacy Skills by Age






| AGE | GRADE(S) | LITERACY MILESTONES |
|---------------|----------|--|
| 5-Years-Old | K | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Read some sight words ▪ Use story language and vocabulary in play and conversation ▪ Begin matching words they hear to words in print ▪ Recognize and match letters to letter sounds ▪ Identify the beginning, middle, and ending of sounds and letters in simple words ▪ Sound out simple words ▪ Tell the who, what, when, where, why, and how of a story ▪ Put a story in order by retelling or using pictures ▪ Predict what happens next in a story ▪ Begin writing and dictating stories ▪ Sound out new words using phonics and word families ▪ Start reading or ask to be read books for information and entertainment ▪ Answer basic questions about what has been read |
| 6-8-Years-Old | 1-3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize up to 200 sight words ▪ Use context clues to decode unfamiliar words ▪ Self-correct when a mistake is made during reading ▪ Start answering questions that require analysis of what has been read ▪ Start writing stories using inventive spelling ▪ Imitate the style of favorite authors when writing. |

Source: Understood²³

²³ Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: Morin, A. "Reading Skills: What to Expect at Different Ages." Understood. <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/signs-symptoms/age-by-age-learning-skills/reading-skills-what-to-expect-at-different-ages>

In terms of instructional foci (see Figure 1.3), the IRIS Center recommends that specific grades within the K-3 spectrum focus on certain essential components of reading instruction. For instance, students in Kindergarten and Grade 1 should receive instruction in phonemic awareness, but by Grade 2, this should no longer remain a core instructional focus. Instruction in fluency, on the other hand, should be introduced after Kindergarten, while students in Kindergarten through Grade 3 should receive literacy instruction in the remaining reading components: phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension.²⁴

Figure 1.3: Grade-Level Emphasis of the Essential Components of Effective Reading Instruction

| COMPONENT | KINDERGARTEN | GRADE 1 | GRADE 2 | GRADE 3 |
|---|--------------|---------|---------|---------|
|  PHONEMIC AWARENESS | ✓ | ✓ | | |
|  PHONICS | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
|  FLUENCY | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
|  VOCABULARY | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
|  COMPREHENSION | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Source: IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University²⁵

Similarly, guidance from the Center on Instruction recommends specific instructional targets—and supporting tasks and activities to support those targets—centering on the essential components of effective reading instruction, as well as related areas. Figure 1.4 on the following page displays the targets of reading instruction and the methods used for that instruction for Grades K-3. Notably, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency are addressed across the K-3 spectrum to varying degrees, whereas phonemic awareness is a focus only in Kindergarten and phonics stops being a target skill after Grade 2.²⁶

²⁴ “Page 3: High-Quality Instruction: Comprehensive Core Reading Program,” Op. cit.

²⁵ Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: Ibid.

²⁶ Torgesen, J. et al. “Teaching All Students to Read in Elementary School: A Guide for Principals.” Center on Instruction, 2007. pp. 5–7. <http://www.fcrr.org/Interventions/pdf/Principals%20Guide-Elementary.pdf>

Figure 1.4: Most Essential Components of Reading Instruction by Grade

| TARGET SKILL | DESCRIPTION OF METHODS FOR INSTRUCTION |
|--|---|
| Kindergarten | |
| Phonemic Awareness | Teachers use explicit instructional techniques and systematic practice to help students acquire skill in identifying the sounds or phonemes in speech. |
| Phonics | Systematic and explicit instruction is used to teach students the relationships between letters and the sounds they typically represent in words. Students also receive instruction and practice to learn how to use knowledge of letter-sound relationships to “sound out” unfamiliar words. |
| Recognizing High-Frequency Words by Sight | Teachers provide repeated exposure to words that occur very frequently in Kindergarten texts so that students learn to read them at a single glance. |
| Vocabulary | Teachers use a variety of techniques, from explicit instruction to incidental teaching, to expand students’ vocabulary. |
| Oral Language Comprehension | Teachers read stories and other texts and discuss their meaning with students to enhance their ability to understand both narrative and expository text. These activities also can help deepen students’ interest in reading and their sense of reading as a meaningful activity. |
| Grade 1 | |
| Phonics/Word Analysis | Grade 1 is a time for students to expand and deepen both the accuracy and fluency with which they can use a variety of strategies to identify unfamiliar words in text. Teachers will explicitly teach more complex phonics in Grade 1, and reading will move from decodable, supported texts to texts with a wider range of regular and irregular words. |
| Fluency | Students expand the range of words they can recognize by sight as they do large amounts of reading. Most words are learned after students have read them correctly multiple times. Teacher modeling of reading in phrases and with proper expression can also help build fluency. |
| Vocabulary | Teachers use a variety of techniques, from explicit instruction to incidental teaching, to expand students’ vocabulary. Teachers often read texts to students that are beyond their current independent reading ability to expose them to more challenging vocabulary than they encounter in text they can read independently. This helps prepare students for the higher levels of vocabulary they will encounter in Grades 2 and 3. |
| Reading Comprehension | Teachers begin to teach specific comprehension strategies, such as the use of story structure, to help students increase their reading comprehension. They also create many opportunities for students to discuss the meaning of the text they are reading. Writing in response to reading and sharing and discussing student writing is also an important instructional technique for reading comprehension. |
| Grade 2 | |
| Phonics/Word Analysis | Students are taught more complex letter patterns and simple morphological units and work extensively with decoding strategies for multi-syllable words |
| Fluency | Teachers encourage extensive reading and use specific methods—such as timed readings, partner reading, and reader’s theater—to stimulate growth in fluency. |
| Vocabulary | Teachers continue to provide direct vocabulary instruction as well as instruction to help students learn how to infer the meanings of words they encounter when reading. |

| TARGET SKILL | DESCRIPTION OF METHODS FOR INSTRUCTION |
|------------------------------|---|
| Reading Comprehension | Teachers model and explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies and provide scaffolded support during reading. They also create many opportunities for students to engage in high-level discussions of the meaning of both narrative and expository text. Writing continues to be used as an aid to build reading comprehension and monitor growth in spelling knowledge. |
| Grade 3 | |
| Word Analysis | Teachers continue to support the growth of students' ability to identify unfamiliar words in text through morphemic analysis and other word-reading strategies. |
| Fluency | Continued growth in students' ability to read grade-level text fluently occurs primarily as a result of large amounts of practice in reading meaningful text. |
| Vocabulary | Teachers continue to deliver explicit and strategic instruction as in Grade 2. |
| Reading Comprehension | Students continue to be taught and supported in the use of reading comprehension strategies and learn how to construct the meaning of text as they participate in carefully guided discussions, both with teachers and among themselves. Writing in response to reading continues to be an important instructional technique in this area. It becomes increasingly important that students master complex content knowledge from other disciplines (e.g., science, social studies) to maintain their ability to comprehend increasingly difficult expository text in these areas. |

Source: Center on Instruction²⁷

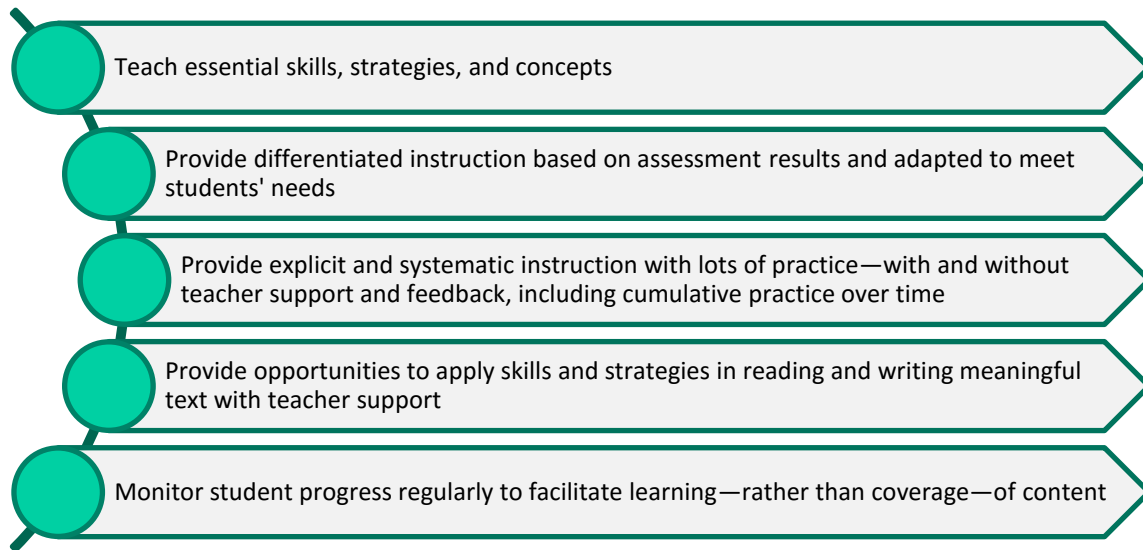
EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Comprehensive literacy instruction should be direct, explicit, and differentiated to meet students' needs.²⁸ Specific guidance from the RTI Action Network recommends that teachers in Grades K-3 and higher integrate the five strategies listed in Figure 1.5, on the following page, as vital aspects of their literacy instruction.

²⁷ Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: Ibid.

²⁸ [1] Gersten, R. et al. "Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades." National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, February 2009. pp. 9, 17–18. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/rti_reading_pg_021809.pdf [2] "Essential Practices in Early and Elementary Literacy." General Education Leadership Network, Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, June 20, 2017. pp. 14–16. <https://memspa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Booklet-FINAL-9.14.17.pdf> [3] Denton, "High-Quality Classroom Instruction: Classroom Reading Instruction That Supports Struggling Readers," Op. cit.

Figure 1.5: Foundational Strategies for Literacy Instruction in Grades K-3



Source: RTI Action Network²⁹

Direct, explicit instruction models the strategies and thinking skills used that effective readers employ. Teachers may model strategies to the whole class, small groups, or individual students, based on needs.³⁰ Likewise, when delivering direct, explicit instruction, teachers will articulate the precise reasons that a given strategy or skill is useful.³¹ Notably, agencies such as the Colorado Department of Education highlight “purposeful, direct, explicit, and systematic instruction [as] valuable for continuous literacy achievement.”³²

Additionally, direct and explicit instruction should be systematic to facilitate logical development of target literacy skills. The RTI Action Network notes that instruction should be carefully sequenced to expose students to more basic skills before encountering or practicing more advanced skills. For example, in the early primary grades, educators may teach letter-sound correspondences and phonics skills in a specific and logical order, allowing students to master key skills before exposing them to new material. Progress monitoring will also allow teachers to identify skills that need re-teaching so they can adjust the pace of instruction accordingly. Moreover, teachers should allow students ample opportunities to practice literacy skills and strategies, in both guided and independent settings.³³

²⁹ Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: Denton, C.A. “Classroom Reading Instruction That Supports Struggling Readers: Key Components for Effective Teaching.” RTI Action Network.

<http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/tieredinstruction/tier1/effectiveteaching>

³⁰ Allington, R. “The Six Ts of Effective Elementary Literacy Instruction.” Reading Rockets, June 2002.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/six-ts-effective-elementary-literacy-instruction>

³¹ “Classroom Strategies.” Reading Rockets. <http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies>

³² “Elements Comprising the Colorado Literacy Framework: IV. Purposeful, Direct, Explicit, and Systematic Instruction.” Colorado Department of Education.

https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/clf/EightElements_04-PurposefulInstruction.asp#2

³³ Denton, “Classroom Reading Instruction That Supports Struggling Readers: Key Components for Effective Teaching,” Op. cit.

Further, **teachers must differentiate their literacy instruction to meet the varied needs, skill sets, and ability levels of diverse learners.**³⁴ Teachers can embed differentiation within whole group instruction, though dividing students into small groups provides a more effective avenue for differentiation. These groups can assemble students of mixed or similar reading abilities depending on the nature of activities.³⁵ Regardless of the composition of small groups or the platform through which differentiation occurs (e.g., whole class instruction) differentiation allows teachers to alter the instructional time, literacy content, and intensity of scaffolding that students receive based on their literacy level.³⁶

³⁴ Kosanovich, M. and C. Verhagen. "Building the Foundation, A Suggested Progression of Sub-Skills to Achieve the Reading Standards: Foundational Skills in the Common Core State Standards." Center on Instruction, 2012. p. 2. <http://www.readingrockets.org/sites/default/files/Building%20the%20Foundation.pdf>

³⁵ "Page 2: High-Quality Instruction: Instructional Practices." IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University. <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/rti03/cresource/q2/p02/#content>

³⁶ Gersten et al., Op. cit., p. 18.

SECTION II: K-3 LITERACY INSTRUCTION

In the following section, Hanover and ULEAD discuss specific strategies that teachers can use to develop students' core literacy competencies—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—in Grades K-3.

OVERVIEW OF K-3 LITERACY INSTRUCTION

The National Center on Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance composed a series of four recommendations and sub-recommendations (see Figure 2.1) on developing reading skills in Grades K-3. These four recommendations serve as a baseline that all literacy-focused teachers and school staff can use to develop students' core reading competencies.

Figure 2.1: Instructional Recommendations to Support Foundational Literacy Skills

| |
|--|
| 1. Teach academic language skills (i.e., the use of inferential and narrative language) and vocabulary |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Engage students in conversations that support the use and comprehension of inferential language▪ Explicitly engage students in developing narrative language skills▪ Teach academic vocabulary in the context of other reading activities |
| 2. Develop awareness of the segments of sounds in speech and how they link to letters |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Teach students to recognize and manipulate segments of sound in speech▪ Teach students letter-sound relations▪ Use word-building and other activities to link students' knowledge of letter-sound relationships with phonemic awareness |
| 3. Teach students to decode words, analyze word parts, and write and recognize words |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Teach students to blend letter sounds and sound-spelling patterns from left to right within a word to produce a recognizable pronunciation▪ Instruct students in common sound-spelling patterns▪ Teach students to recognize common word parts▪ Have students read decodable words in isolation and in text▪ Teach regular and irregular high-frequency words so that students can recognize them efficiently▪ Introduce non-decodable words that are essential to the meaning of the text as whole words |
| 4. Ensure students read connected text every day to support accuracy, fluency, and comprehension |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ As students read orally, model strategies, scaffold, and provide feedback to support accurate and efficient word identification▪ Teach students to self-monitor their understanding of text and self-correct word-reading errors▪ Facilitate oral reading practice with feedback to develop fluent and accurate reading with expression |

Source: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences³⁷

³⁷ Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: Foorman, B. et al. "Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade." National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, April 2017. p. 2.
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc_foundationalreading_040717.pdf

PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Instruction for students in Kindergarten and Grade 1 should include a focus on phonemic awareness to support reading comprehension, spelling, and decoding. For beginning readers, teachers should provide auditory examples to display how sounds are combined to form words.³⁸ Importantly, the National Reading Panel finds that instruction targeting phonemic awareness is most effective when students manipulate one or two phoneme types at a time and when students learn in small groups.³⁹

Below, Figure 2.2 lists instructional tips for teaching phonemic awareness to students in Kindergarten and Grade 1. Notably, these strategies emphasize modeling of skills to promote phonemic awareness, in addition to active learning techniques.

Figure 2.2: Tips for Teaching Phonemic Awareness

- ❖ Start with easy “blend” sounds that are continuous rather than with short, “stop” sounds
- ❖ When modeling sounds, instruct students to watch the speaker’s lips and mouth
- ❖ Ask students to practice with mirrors, so they can watch the movements of their lips and mouths
- ❖ Use games, music, pictures, and objects to teach early phonemic awareness skills
- ❖ Engage students in active learning techniques (e.g., students hold up fingers for each sound in a word)
- ❖ Avoid adding in extra sounds such as the “schwa” / ə / after individual phonemes

Source: IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University⁴⁰

PHONICS

Instruction in phonics should be delivered to students across the K-3 instructional sequence.⁴¹ Phonics supports students’ word recognition, reading, and spelling by facilitating knowledge of the alphabetic principle, “the relationship between sounds and written letters.”⁴² Notably, in delivering phonics instruction, the primary element that drives student success is encountering decodable words in context following more explicit instruction.⁴³ Figure 2.3 lists tips for instruction in phonics that can support teachers’ planning and delivery.

³⁸ “Page 4: Phonemic Awareness.” IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University.

<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/rti03/cresource/q3/p04/#content>

³⁹ “Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment on the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction.” National Reading Panel, April 2000. p. 2.6.

<https://www1.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/nrp/Documents/report.pdf>

⁴⁰ Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: “Page 4: Phonemic Awareness,” Op. cit.

⁴¹ “Page 3: High-Quality Instruction: Comprehensive Core Reading Program,” Op. cit.

⁴² [1] “Page 5: Phonics and Word Study.” IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University.

<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/rti03/cresource/q3/p05/#content> [2] Williams, C. et al. “Word Study Instruction in the K-2 Classroom.” Reading Rockets, April 2009. <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/word-study-instruction-k-2-classroom>

⁴³ “Guide for Designing Systemic Reading Instruction and Intervention K-3.” Minnesota Department of Education. p. 8. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.729.9390&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Figure 2.3: Tips for Teaching Phonics

- ❖ Include instruction on high-frequency sight words
- ❖ Teach explicit strategies for decoding and reading multi-syllable words
- ❖ Reinforce decoding skills with spelling activities
- ❖ Provide ample practice for the decoding skills that students have already learned
- ❖ Include activities that allow students to practice decoding skills through writing and spelling
- ❖ Encourage students to use context clues to support their decoding efforts
- ❖ Use word-building activities to help students decode words
- ❖ Utilize short books and stories featuring words with the letter-sound relationships taught in class
- ❖ Create tasks with letters and letter combinations students are learning so they can form new words

Source: IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University⁴⁴

Teachers may provide phonics instruction *incidentally*—by highlighting patterns opportunistically throughout instruction—or *systematically*—by planning a specific sequence of phonics topics to guide instruction.⁴⁵ Notably, the IRIS Center recommends that phonics instruction begins by teaching an outlined sequence of letter-sound correspondences that students can then use to decode words.⁴⁶ Below, Figure 2.4 presents several modes of phonics instruction, which vary in their level of explicitness, that can be used either incidentally or systematically.

Figure 2.4: Types of Phonics Instruction

| APPROACH | DESCRIPTION |
|---------------------------------|--|
| ANALOGY PHONICS | Teaching students unfamiliar words by analogy to known words |
| ANALYTIC PHONICS | Teaching students to analyze letter-sound relations in previously learned words to avoid pronouncing sounds in isolation |
| EMBEDDED PHONICS | Teaching phonics skills by embedding phonics instruction in text reading |
| PHONICS THROUGH SPELLING | Teaching students to segment words into phonemes and select letters for those phonemes (i.e., teaching students to spell words phonemically) |
| SYNTHETIC PHONICS | Teaching students to convert letters into sounds or phonemes and then blend sounds to form recognizable words |

Source: National Reading Panel and Reading Rockets⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: “Page 5: Phonics and Word Study,” Op. cit.

⁴⁵ “Phonics Instruction.” National Reading Panel and Reading Rockets, April 2000.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/phonics-instruction>

⁴⁶ “Page 5: Phonics and Word Study,” Op. cit.

⁴⁷ Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: “Phonics Instruction,” Op. cit.

FLUENCY

Instruction to promote reading fluency should begin in Grade 1 and continue through Grade 3.⁴⁸ Developing fluency facilitates reading comprehension, and students who struggle to decode words are also likely to struggle to understand what they read.⁴⁹ Thus, to increase fluency, teachers should provide opportunities for repeated oral reading practice.⁵⁰ Strategies to incorporate oral reading into instruction include:⁵¹

- **Repeated Reading:** A student reads the same passage multiple times until fluency is achieved.
- **Using Technology:** A student uses a computer or other equipment to assist with fluency.
- **Choral Reading:** The class or group reads out loud with the teacher.
- **Partner Reading:** Students practice reading and rereading in pairs.
- **Echo Reading:** Students echo a teacher or another skilled student reader.

Monitoring students' progress is essential to identify student reading levels and match them with appropriate texts to practice decoding and reading aloud.⁵² In other words, students should not practice fluency with texts that will frustrate them.⁵³ Figure 2.5 on the following page outlines three levels of reading fluency that teachers can use to guide instruction and determine the level of differentiation or scaffolding individual students will need to be successful.

⁴⁸ "Page 3: High-Quality Instruction: Comprehensive Core Reading Program," Op. cit.

⁴⁹ "Page 6: Fluency." IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University.

<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/rti03/cresource/q3/p06/#content>

⁵⁰ "Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment on the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction," Op. cit., pp. 3.3-3.4.

⁵¹ Bulleted text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: "Page 6: Fluency," Op. cit.

⁵² [1] Hasbrouck, J. "Screening, Diagnosing, and Progress Monitoring for Fluency: The Details." Reading Rockets, 2006.




<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/screening-diagnosing-and-progress-monitoring-fluency-details> [2]

"Fluency: Instructional Guidelines and Student Activities." Texas Education Agency and Reading Rockets, 2002.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/fluency-instructional-guidelines-and-student-activities>

⁵³ "Page 6: Fluency," Op. cit.

Figure 2.5: Reading Fluency Levels

| FLUENCY LEVEL | DESCRIPTION | IMPLICATIONS |
|---|--|--|
|  INDEPENDENT | Reading is relatively easy for students, who read with 95% accuracy (i.e., 1 out of 20 words is difficult). This is the highest level at which students can read without help. | Students will be able to practice fluency alone or with peers. |
|  INSTRUCTIONAL | Reading is challenging, but manageable, for students, who read with 90% accuracy (i.e., 1 out of 10 words is difficult). At this level, students may need minor assistance. | Students may be able to read independently but will need some support. |
|  FRUSTRATION | Reading is difficult for students, who read with less than 90% accuracy (i.e., more than 1 out of 10 words are difficult). Students require extensive or moderate help. | Students should be given lower level text or shorter passages. |

Source: Multiple sources⁵⁴

Below, Figure 2.6 lists a comprehensive list of tips for promoting students’ reading fluency that can assist teachers in delivering effective Tier 1 literacy instruction.

Figure 2.6: Tips for Teaching Fluency

- ❖ Recognize that being able to decode words is not enough for students to master fluency
- ❖ Students must be able to decode words effortlessly and even to recognize sight-words automatically
- ❖ Emphasize and model speed, accuracy, and expression
- ❖ Provide opportunities for students to identify whether teacher reading sounds natural or unnatural
- ❖ Help students choose texts or provide materials at their independent or instructional level
- ❖ Ask students to provide an example of a sentence read with speed, accuracy, and expression
- ❖ Determine whether students understand the fluency terms speed, accuracy, and expression
- ❖ Reteach any concepts that students do not understand
- ❖ Motivate and encourage independent reading
- ❖ Practice reading and rereading text

Source: IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Figure adapted from: [1] “Fluency: An Introduction.” Partnership for Reading and Reading Rockets, 2001. <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/fluency-introduction> [2] “Reading Levels.” University of Utah Reading Clinic. <http://www.uurc.utah.edu/General/ReadLevels.php> [3] “Page 6: Fluency,” Op. cit.

⁵⁵ Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: “Page 6: Fluency,” Op. cit.

VOCABULARY

Instruction that increases students' vocabulary should occur across Grades K-3.⁵⁶ However, there is no singular best method for vocabulary instruction. Instead, teachers can use a combination of indirect and direct vocabulary instruction to build students' literacy skills in the general education classroom.⁵⁷ These two methods are distinguished as follows:⁵⁸

- **Indirect Vocabulary Instruction:** Students learn words through daily conversations and independent reading. Teachers need to consistently use new and interesting words, read aloud to students, and encourage them to read independently.
- **Direct Vocabulary Instruction:** Teachers intentionally focus on certain words and use a variety of methods to support student learning.

On average, children can learn between two and five new words per day or 750 to 5,000 words per year.⁵⁹ However, although direct instruction supports students in learning new vocabulary—especially for specific lessons—students can only learn eight to ten words per week through this method. As such, teachers should also introduce new vocabulary indirectly through daily interactions with students and through songs, books, and other media.⁶⁰ In addition, teachers may prompt students to draw connections between words they do and do not know to create semantic or contextual associations.⁶¹ Figure 2.10 on the following page lists additional tips for vocabulary instruction.

⁵⁶ "Page 3: High-Quality Instruction: Comprehensive Core Reading Program," Op. cit.

⁵⁷ Sedita, J. "Effective Vocabulary Instruction." *Insights on Learning Disabilities*, 2:1, 2005. p. 2.
<https://keystoliteracy.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/effective-vocabulary-instruction.pdf>

⁵⁸ Bulleted text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: "Page 7: Vocabulary." IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University. <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/rti03/cresource/q3/p07/#content>

⁵⁹ Sprenger, M. "Teaching the Critical Vocabulary of the Common Core: What Does the Research Say about Vocabulary?" 6/2013. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/113040/chapters/What-Does-the-Research-Say-About-Vocabulary%C2%A2.aspx>

⁶⁰ "Page 7: Vocabulary," Op. cit.

⁶¹ "Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment on the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction," Op. cit., p. 4.18.

Figure 2.10: Tips for Teaching Vocabulary

- ❖ Be aware of factors that influence vocabulary instruction, such as:
 - Students' learning strengths and weaknesses
 - Complexity of words
 - Students' familiarity with the concepts represented by new words
- ❖ Determine important vocabulary to teach before asking students to read them in texts, and consider:
 - How important the word is to the unit of study
 - To what extent the word is useful outside the context of the lesson
 - Whether there are words the students can learn on their own through the context of the lesson
 - Whether there are words in the unit that may motivate students to learn other new words
- ❖ Provide repeated exposure to words
- ❖ Develop activities that allow students to use words across different contexts
- ❖ Engage students in discussions that include new vocabulary
- ❖ Make available a number of good books—both narrative and expository—on a variety of topics
- ❖ Encourage independent learning of new vocabulary from context
- ❖ Teach meanings of prefixes, suffixes, and common root words
- ❖ Use a variety of strategies for teaching a word's meaning (e.g., synonyms, antonyms, pictures)
- ❖ Introduce words in a context with which students are already familiar
- ❖ When both the word and concept are unknown, teach the word explicitly to increase comprehension

Source: IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University⁶²

READING COMPREHENSION






Teachers across Grades K-3 should support students in developing specific strategies and skills to facilitate reading comprehension.⁶³ Importantly, comprehension strategies and skills represent ways to think about text that students have read that move beyond surface meaning. As such, students in early primary grades should have comprehension strategies presented to them in simple terms to facilitate growth in their cognitive abilities to examine and analyze texts with increasing depth as their education advances.⁶⁴ Teachers can follow the five recommendations to improve and support reading comprehension in Grades K-3, as shown in Figure 2.7 on the following page.

⁶² Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: "Page 7: Vocabulary," Op. cit.

⁶³ "Page 3: High-Quality Instruction: Comprehensive Core Reading Program," Op. cit.

⁶⁴ "A Closer Look at the Five Essential Components of Effective Reading Instruction: A Review of Scientifically Based Reading Research for Teachers." Learning Point Associates, 2004, p. 30. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Figure 2.7: Recommendations to Support Reading Comprehension in Grades K-3

| RECOMMENDATION | INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES |
|---|--|
|  <p>Teach Students How to Use Reading Comprehension Strategies</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teach students how to use multiple research-based strategies ▪ Teach reading comprehension strategies individually or in combination ▪ Teach reading comprehension strategies by using a gradual release of responsibility |
|  <p>Teach Students to Use Organization and Structure</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explain how to identify and connect the parts of narrative texts ▪ Provide instruction on common structures of informational texts |
|  <p>Guide Students through Focused, High-Quality Discussion on Meaning</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Structure discussion to complement text, instructional purpose, and readers' ability and grade level ▪ Develop questions that require students to think deeply about text ▪ Ask follow-up questions to encourage and facilitate discussion ▪ Have students lead structured small-group discussions |
|  <p>Select Texts Purposefully to Support Comprehension Development</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teach reading comprehension with multiple genres of text ▪ Choose texts with richness and depth of ideas and information ▪ Choose texts with word recognition and comprehension difficulty appropriate for students' reading ability and instructional activities ▪ Use texts that support the purpose of instruction |
|  <p>Establish Engaging and Motivating Contexts to Teach Comprehension</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Help students discover the purpose and benefits of reading ▪ Encourage students to see themselves as successful readers ▪ Give students reading choices ▪ Give students the opportunity to learn by collaborating with peers |

Source: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences⁶⁵

To master reading comprehension strategies, students require plenty of opportunities for practice, as they will typically need three or more lessons on a given strategy before they can use it independently.⁶⁶ Consequently, teachers should deliver consistent and differentiated initial instruction—and follow-up instruction as needed—to ensure that students are able to execute strategies on their own.⁶⁷ This instruction may consist of explicit modeling of strategies, summarizing, generating and answering questions, and making inferences, in addition to many other strategies as listed in Figure 2.8 on the following page.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: Shanahan, T. et al. "Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade." National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, September 2010. p. 1. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

⁶⁶ "Page 8: Reading Comprehension." IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University. <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/rti03/cresource/q3/p08/#content>

⁶⁷ Torgesen et al., Op. cit., p. 3.

⁶⁸ [1] "Page 8: Reading Comprehension," Op. cit. [2] Adler, C.R. "Seven Strategies to Teach Students Text Comprehension." Reading Rockets. <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/seven-strategies-teach-students-text-comprehension>

Figure 2.8: Instructional Strategies to Develop Reading Comprehension Skills

| INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY | DESCRIPTION |
|---------------------------------|---|
| COMPREHENSION MONITORING | Students learn how to be aware of their understanding of material |
| COOPERATIVE LEARNING | Students learn reading strategies together |
| GRAPHIC AND SEMANTIC ORGANIZERS | Students graphically represent material to assist comprehension |
| QUESTION ANSWERING | Students answer teacher questions and receive feedback |
| QUESTION GENERATION | Students ask themselves questions about aspects of the story |
| STORY STRUCTURE | Students use story structure to recall content and answer questions |
| SUMMARIZATION | Students identify the main or most important ideas of a text |

Source: Minnesota Department of Education⁶⁹

Further, **teachers should focus instruction on specific reading comprehension strategies that students can use before, during, and after reading.** For example, teachers may model the process of predicting a story’s outcome for students prior to reading or provide explicit instruction on identifying a text’s main idea. Similarly, teachers can also identify ways that students can use specific strategies at different points in the reading process (e.g., generating questions before, during, and after reading).⁷⁰ Figure 2.9 displays strategies teachers can use to support students at all three stages of reading a text.

Figure 2.9: Strategies to Support Students Before, During, and After Reading

| BEFORE READING |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduce and teach key vocabulary ▪ Activate prior knowledge ▪ Build critical background information |
| DURING READING |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teach students how to self-monitor their comprehension through demonstrations and think-alouds ▪ Develop and guide students through deep questions and higher-level thinking ▪ Teach students to draw inferences through think-alouds and initial and follow-up questions ▪ Teach students how to summarize the main idea of selected paragraphs ▪ Ask students to students to confirm, disconfirm, or extend predictions and questions |
| AFTER READING |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teach students to reflect upon what they have read ▪ Teach students to reread critical sections of text ▪ Teach students how to summarize what they have read ▪ Teach students to think about how they might use information from texts in the future |

Source: Colorado Department of Education⁷¹

⁶⁹ Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: “Guide for Designing Systemic Reading Instruction and Intervention K-3,” Op. cit., pp. 12–13.

⁷⁰ “Page 8: Reading Comprehension,” Op. cit.

⁷¹ Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: “Understanding the Relationship between Reading Comprehension Skills and Strategies.” Colorado Department of Education. pp. 1–2.
https://www.cde.state.co.us/sites/default/files/documents/coloradoliteracy/clf/downloads/understanding_the_relationship_between_reading_comprehension_skills_and_strategies.pdf

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