Opportunity Culture Connect Series

Bringing the Science of Reading Into the Classroom

Reading research is clear: Students become increasingly skilled readers the better they can identify sounds and letter combinations. Through that enhanced skill in word “decoding”—rather than guessing word sounds from pictures or context—students learn how to acquire more and more new, unfamiliar words. Coupled with growing spoken vocabulary (language comprehension) and exposure to a range of background knowledge, decoding skills help students better comprehend text meaning. Materials that interest each student and increased time spent reading also increase comprehension. Middle and high school students who are still learning reading basics especially need explicit teaching of critical thinking and other comprehension skills, along with decoding and increased spoken vocabularies. Quantitative studies back these approaches.

Decoding: Sounds and Word Parts
- Understand the sounds of spoken language (“phonological awareness”)
- Figure out how to say, read, and spell new sounds and letter combinations (“phonics”)

Language Comprehension: Spoken Vocabulary
- Hear, understand, and say more words (“vocabulary”)
- Hear, understand, and say increasingly complex strings of words—sentences and paragraphs (“language”)

Reading Comprehension: Meaning
- Understand the author’s meaning when reading (“comprehension”)
- Articulate what the reader thinks, too (“critical thinking”)

Two researchers created a formula, supported by research, about how students best learn, called the simple view of reading:

<table>
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<th><strong>Decoding (word recognition)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Language Comprehension</strong></th>
<th><strong>Reading Comprehension</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Building awareness of the sounds of spoken language (phonological awareness)</td>
<td>Strengthening the ability to understand and express words and language</td>
<td>Understanding written text with purpose and meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applying the rules of phonics in reading and spelling</td>
<td>Developing vocabulary through knowledge of word parts &amp; uses</td>
<td>Engaging in critical thinking about the text</td>
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**Fluency:** Reading with accuracy, at a reasonable rate for comprehension, and with appropriate expression


Research shows that more students read best when schools teach all of these elements and when teachers monitor each student’s skills and adjust instruction to meet each student’s needs. In addition, use a structured literacy approach like those found in our *Recommended High-Quality Curricula*. This ensures that literacy lessons are:

- Systematic, following a daily routine (for example, built into a lesson plan aligned to the simple view of reading);
- Sequential, with logical and developmental progressions (such as short vowels before vowel blends);
- Explicit, by naming and modeling the skill for students (for example, “now we will sort words ending in -tion”); and
- Cumulative, building on concepts and skills previously learned.

**Summary.** To incorporate the “science” of reading—the best research about what works—into your teaching:

- Start with a high-quality reading curriculum. Prepare structured literacy lessons that teach the multifaceted skills from the reading formula above, and that meet the needs of students at differing reading levels.
- Use the Science of Reading Introduction and Study & Action Guide incorporating Barksdale Reading Institute’s reading instruction table (password: abc123) to assess your reading instruction and to improve fast.
- Find more lessons and assessments, by grade, to supplement your curriculum, from Student Achievement Partners.
- Increase reading time and provide a variety of reading material from which students may choose.
- Use the Opportunity Culture Instructional Excellence Summary for high-growth general teaching methods.
- See also the Learner Variability Navigator for more on addressing learning differences.

*The Opportunity Culture Connect Series connects research with educators in practical, short summaries.*