

# Annotated Guide for Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade

## Purpose

This document was developed by the Agency of Education (AOE) to support supervisory unions and districts (SU/SDs), educators, and the Advisory Council on Literacy in performing their duties as defined in Act 28 of 2021. What follows is an annotated summary of [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#) from What Works Clearinghouse (WWC). This practice guide, as summarized below, is designed to help classroom teachers and specialists improve the foundational literacy skills of students in grades kindergarten through 3rd grade.

## Background

On page 1 of the practice guide, it states:

*This guide provides teachers, reading coaches, principals, and other educators with actionable recommendations for developing the foundational reading skills of students in kindergarten through 3rd grade. This guide might also be relevant for educating older students who need reading remediation. Each recommendation provides instructional advice on a specific topic; together, the four recommendations presented in this practice guide highlight three interrelated themes for improving instruction in foundational reading skills.*

## Overarching Themes:

- “Reinforcing the effectiveness of instruction in alphabets, fluency, and vocabulary” (1).
- “Providing instruction in broad oral language skills” (1).
- “Integrating all aspects of reading instruction” (1-2).

## Recommendations

The two recommendations that have the strongest evidence include:

- **Recommendation 2:** “Develop awareness of the segments of sounds in speech and how they link to letters” (3).
- **Recommendation 3:** “Teach students to decode words, analyze word parts, and write and recognize words” (3).

The recommendation with “moderate” evidence is:

- **Recommendation 4:** “Ensure that each student reads connected text every day to support reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension” (3).

## Contact Information:

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The recommendation with “minimal” evidence is:

- **Recommendation 1:** “Teach students academic language skills, including the use of inferential and narrative language, and vocabulary knowledge” (3).

More information about these recommendations can be found below, organized by level of evidence. See pages 2-3 of the guide for a summary of supporting research as well as more information about what the levels of evidence mean and how they are calculated. See pages 3-5 for information about how to use the guide as well as alignment with existing practice guides, which are included in the resources at the end of this document.

## **Recommendations with the Strongest Evidence**

### **Recommendation 2: Develop Awareness of the Segments of Sounds in Speech and How They Link to Letters (pages 14-21)**

*The National Reading Panel (NRP) report found that teaching students to recognize and manipulate **the segments of sound** in words (also referred to as **phonological awareness**) and to link those sounds to letters is necessary to prepare them to read words and comprehend text. Recent evidence reviewed for this guide supports the NRP’s conclusion. The ability to isolate sounds and then link those sounds to letters will help students read about 70 percent of regular monosyllabic words, such as fish, sun, and eat. The system for linking sounds to letters is referred to as the **alphabetic principle**. To effectively decode (convert from print to speech) and encode (convert from speech to print) words, students must be able to identify the individual sounds, or phonemes, that make up the words they hear in speech; name the letters of the alphabet as they appear in print; [and] identify each letter’s corresponding sound. (14)*

A summary of the evidence can be found on page 15.

#### **How to carry out the recommendation:**

- “Teach students to recognize and manipulate segments of sound in speech” (15-18).
- “Teach students letter–sound relations” (18-19).
- “Use word-building and other activities to link students’ knowledge of letter–sound relationships with phonemic awareness” (19-20).

Potential obstacles and solutions can be found on page 21, including addressing students’ persistent problems with phonological awareness.

### **Recommendation 3: Teach Students to Decode Words, Analyze Word Parts, and Write and Recognize Words (pages 22-31)**

*Once students know a few consonants and vowels, they can begin to apply their letter– sound knowledge to decode and read words in isolation or in connected text. Students also need to learn how to break down and read complex words by segmenting the words into pronounceable word parts. To do this, students must understand **morphology**, or the knowledge of the meaningful word parts in the language. Learning to recognize letter patterns and word parts and understanding that sounds relate to letters in predictable and unpredictable ways, will help students decode and read increasingly complex words. It will also help them to read with greater*

*fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. The more words students read and the more they learn sound–spelling patterns (groups of letters that represent a single sound, such as ph) and word parts (letters or combinations of letters that appear in multiple words and hold a specific meaning, such as -ing), the more they will be able to recognize words in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts. Similarly, helping students to immediately recognize high-frequency words facilitates more fluent reading. Increasing the ease of word recognition allows students to focus more on word meaning when they read, ultimately supporting reading comprehension. (22)*

A summary of the evidence can be found on page 23.

#### **How to carry out the recommendation:**

- “Teach students to blend letter sounds and sound–spelling patterns from left to right within a word to produce a recognizable pronunciation” (23-25).
- “Instruct students in common sound–spelling patterns” (25-27).
- “Have students read decodable words in isolation and in text” (28).
- “Teach regular and irregular high-frequency words so that students can recognize them efficiently” (28-30).
- “Introduce non-decodable words that are essential to the meaning of the text as whole words” (30).

Potential obstacles and solutions can be found on page 31, including a discussion about invented spelling.

#### **Recommendation with “Moderate Evidence”**

##### **Recommendation 4: Ensure that Each Student Reads Connected Text Every Day to Support Reading Accuracy, Fluency, and Comprehension (pages 32-37)**

*Reading connected text (multiple related sentences) poses different challenges than reading isolated words or phrases. Reading connected text accurately, fluently, and with appropriate phrasing and comprehension requires students to identify words quickly, integrate ideas in the text with their background knowledge, self-monitor their understanding, and apply strategies to support comprehension and repair misunderstandings. The National Reading Panel (NRP) found compelling evidence that instruction to increase reading fluency is critical to both reading comprehension and future reading success and ease. The new research examined for this guide confirms those earlier conclusions. Having students read connected text daily, both with and without constructive feedback, facilitates the development of reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension and should begin as soon as students can identify a few words. Students should interact with a variety of connected texts, including texts of varied levels, diverse genres, and wide-ranging content. In particular, students should read both informational and narrative text, beginning in the early grades. (32)*

A summary of the evidence can be found on page 33.

#### **How to carry out the recommendation:**

- “As students read orally, model strategies, scaffold, and provide feedback to support accurate and efficient word identification” (33-34).

- “Teach students to self-monitor their understanding of the text and to self-correct word-reading errors” (34-35).
- “Provide opportunities for oral reading practice with feedback to develop fluent and accurate reading with expression” (35-37).

Potential obstacles and solutions can be found on page 37, including suggestions for selecting accessible texts.

## Recommendation with “Minimal Evidence”

### **Recommendation 1: Teach Students Academic Language Skills, Including the Use of Inferential and Narrative Language, and Vocabulary Knowledge (pages 6-13)**

*Academic language is a critical component of oral language. Academic language skills include the following abilities (see Example 1.1 for an explanation of each): articulating ideas beyond the immediate context (inferential language); clearly relating a series of events, both fictional and nonfictional (narrative language); [and] comprehending and using a wide range of academic vocabulary and grammatical structures, such as pronoun references. Students who enter kindergarten with limited academic language skills typically lag behind their peers in reading. Academic language skills enable students to understand the formal structures and words found in books and school. Academic language includes words and structures that are common across subjects and unique to individual subjects. While students typically develop social language skills naturally—those used to communicate informally with family and friends—academic language skills usually require instruction. By guiding students to develop their academic language skills, teachers can mitigate some of the challenges that students encounter when learning to comprehend text. (6)*

A summary of the evidence can be found on pages 7-8.

#### **How to carry out the recommendation:**

- “Engage students in conversations that support the use and comprehension of inferential language” (8-9).
- “Explicitly engage students in developing narrative language skills” (9-11).
- “Teach academic vocabulary in the context of other reading activities” (11-12).

Potential obstacles and solutions can be found on page 13, including a suggestion for how to deal with time constraints.

## Resources

### **Resources from WWC Related to this Practice Guide:**

- [Tips for Supporting Reading Skills at Home](#) and [supporting evidence](#)
- [Webpage of Additional Resources](#)

## Other Practice Guides that Support this Practice Guide:

- [Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention \(RtI\) and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades](#) offers five recommendations to help educators identify struggling readers and implement strategies to support their reading achievement.
- [Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#), a companion to the current guide, offers five recommendations to help educators improve the reading comprehension skills of students in kindergarten through grade 3.
- [Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers](#) offers four recommendations on writing instruction for students in kindergarten through grade 6.
- [Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School](#) provides four recommendations on what works for English learners during reading and content-area instruction.
- [Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making](#) includes guidance on the use of ongoing assessment to understand students' abilities and shape instruction.

## Reference

Foorman, B., Beyler, N., Borradaile, K., Coyne, M., Denton, C. A., Dimino, J., Furgeson, J., Hayes, L., Henke, J., Justice, L., Keating, B., Lewis, W., Sattar, S., Streke, A., Wagner, R., & Wissel, S. (2016). *Foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through 3rd grade* (NCEE 2016-4008). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from the NCEE website: <http://whatworks.ed.gov>.