

BEST PRACTICES IN LITERACY

Reading is a complex balance of skills and strategies that are used simultaneously in ever-changing combinations and amounts to construct meaning from the text. Students need to be taught these skills and strategies explicitly until they are able to apply them readily and easily while reading various types of texts. Our primary goal is to emphasize the construction of meaning. So the teaching of any skills and strategies are for the purpose of constructing meaning.

Best Practice 1: Have Most Skilled Teach Least Skilled	The most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher. Studies have shown that effective teachers are effective with students of all achievement levels regardless of the levels of heterogeneity in the classes.
Best Practice 2: Provide a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum	A viable curriculum provides teachers with clear guidance regarding the content in English/Language Arts to be addressed in specific classes and at specific grade levels. A guaranteed curriculum means that it is actually taught in the classroom. It also ensures that time is adequate to address the essential content and that instructional time is protected from needless interruptions.
Best Practice 3: Assess to Inform Instruction	Teachers routinely monitor and assess the reading levels and progress of individual students. This ongoing evaluation directs and informs instruction.
Best Practice 4: Teach Reading As a Process	Reading is a process and needs to be taught as such using the "Apprenticeship Model." The apprenticeship model has steps that include: Model the Learning, Shared Learning (guided by the teacher), Guided Learning/Practice (student takes the lead but has supervision from the teacher), and Independent Practice (student uses the process/strategy enough to make it routine).
Best Practice 5: Address Areas From Results of the National Reading Panel study.	A balanced program consists of five areas identified in the <u>Results of the National Reading Panel</u> which are a) phonemic or phonological awareness; b) phonics; c) fluency; d) vocabulary; and e) comprehension.

Best Practice 6: Teach Explicit Word Analysis Instruction (Including Phonics if Necessary)	<p>Teachers provide explicit instruction, build word knowledge, and directly teach skills and strategies that good readers use for word analysis (phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition, structural analysis, context clues, vocabulary.)</p>
Best Practice 7: Set Challenging Goals and Give Effective Feedback	<p>Setting clear and challenging but attainable literacy goals effect individual student achievement. High expectations for students, particularly those from low SES backgrounds, are a cornerstone of school effectiveness. When effective feedback is provided to students, achievement is higher. Feedback must be timely and it must be specific to the content being taught.</p>
Best Practice 8: Teach Thinking Skills Explicitly	<p>Proficient readers use thinking skills in the reading process. They include: synthesizing, analyzing, evaluating, making application to authentic situations, making and confirming predictions, visualizing, summarizing, drawing inferences, and self monitoring. Teachers must teach students these strategies (what good readers actually do when they read) explicitly and model them (by thinking aloud) with students.</p>
Best Practice 9: Teach Before, During, and After Reading Strategies	<p>Teachers teach students a large repertoire of reading strategies to use before, during, and after reading. Students know when to apply and routinely use these tools in order to be more proficient and to construct more meaning from texts.</p>
Best Practice 10: Provide Broad Reading and Writing Experiences in All Curricular Areas	<p>Students have numerous reading and writing experiences in multiple genre and styles and in all curricular content areas. Reading and writing are used as tools to support learning in all areas.</p>
Best Practice 11: Provide Instruction at the Appropriate Levels and For a Purpose	<p>Students have opportunities to read and receive instruction at their appropriate level every day. Students have extensive opportunities to read for a variety of purposes and to apply what is read every day. Students use discussion and writing to organize their thinking and to reflect on what they read.</p>

<p>Best Practice 12: Provide Opportunities for Independent Reading</p>	<p>Students should have opportunities for sustained reading (oral and/or silent) every day to increase fluency and vocabulary. Struggling readers should read orally in groups of two or three rather than read silently all the time.</p>
<p>Best Practice 13: Provide a Literacy- Rich Environment</p>	<p>Literacy-rich environments display words and print everywhere, provide opportunities and tools that engage students in reading and writing activities, and celebrate students' reading and writing efforts. Each classroom and school has an extensive collection of reading materials with a wide range of high interest, level appropriate fiction and non-fiction. Reading to students at all grade levels is a critical part of this literacy-rich environment.</p>
<p>Best Practice 14: Collaborate and Reflect</p>	<p>Teachers routinely self-reflect and collaborate on instructional practices and student progress within school and/or district.</p>
<p>Best Practice 15: Establish School/Family/ Community Partnerships</p>	<p>Families, communities, and schools collaborate to support literacy development of students at home and school. Three features define effective parental and community involvement: communication, participation, and governance.</p>

FINDINGS AND DETERMINATIONS OF THE NATIONAL READING PANEL

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness instruction involves teaching children to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken syllables and words. The National Reading Panel did a meta-analysis of 52 phonemic awareness studies, including 96 comparisons of treatment and control groups to determine treatment effects of various phonemic awareness programs. The results of the meta-analysis found:

- Teaching children to manipulate phonemes in words was highly effective under a variety of teaching conditions with a variety of learners across a range of grade and age levels.
- Teaching phonemic awareness to children significantly improves their reading more than instruction that lacks any attention to phonemic awareness.
- Phonemic awareness training exerted strong and significant effects on reading and spelling development although it was not shown to be effective with improvement of spelling in disabled readers.
- The effects of phonemic awareness instruction lasted well beyond the end of training.
- Phonemic awareness training found to be most effective included explicit and systematic instruction teaching children to manipulate phonemes with letters in small groups.

Phonics Instruction

Systematic phonics instruction is designed to increase accuracy in decoding and word recognition skills. The National Reading Panel did a meta-analysis of 38 phonics instruction studies, including 66 comparisons of treatment and control groups to determine treatment effects of various phonics programs. The results of the meta-analysis found:

- Systematic phonics instruction produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through 6th grade and for children having difficulty learning to read.
- The ability to read and spell words was enhanced in kindergartners who received systematic beginning phonics instruction.
- First graders who were taught phonics systematically were better able to decode and spell, and they showed significant improvement in their ability to comprehend text.
- Older children receiving phonics instruction were better able to decode and spell words and to read text orally, but their comprehension of text was not significantly improved.
- Systematic synthetic phonics instruction (teaching students explicitly to convert letters into sounds [phonemes] and then blend the sounds to form recognizable words)

had a positive and significant effect on disabled readers' reading skills. These children improved substantially in their ability to read words and showed significant, albeit small, gains in their ability to process text.

- Synthetic phonics instruction benefits both students with learning disabilities and low-achieving students who are not disabled.
- Systematic synthetic phonics instruction was significantly more effective in improving low socioeconomic status children's alphabetic knowledge and word reading skills than instructional approaches that were less focused on these initial reading skills.
- Across all grade levels, systematic phonics instruction improved the ability of good readers to spell particularly at the kindergarten level, decreasing in later grades.
- The effects of systematic early phonics instruction were significant and substantial in kindergarten and the 1st grade, indicating that systematic phonics programs should be implemented at these age and grade levels.
- Systematic phonics instruction studies were conducted in many classrooms with typical classroom teachers and typical American or English-speaking students from a variety of background and socioeconomic levels.
- In implementing systematic phonics instruction, educators must keep the *end* in mind and ensure that children understand the purpose of learning letter sounds and that they are able to apply these skills accurately and fluently in their daily reading and writing activities.
- High priority should be given to teacher training to prepare them to teach systematic phonics instruction and to help them maintain consistency of instruction while still encouraging the unique contributions of teachers.
- Because students are known to vary greatly in the skills they bring to school, it is particularly important that preservice and inservice education programs provide teachers with decisionmaking frameworks to guide their selection, integration, and implementation of phonics instruction within a complete reading program.
- Phonics skills must be integrated with the development of phonemic awareness, fluency, and text reading comprehension skills.

Fluency

Fluent readers are able to read orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. Fluency is one of several critical factors necessary for reading comprehension. Two instructional approaches have typically been used to teach reading fluency: 1) guided repeated oral reading and 2) independent silent reading.

Guided Repeated Oral Reading

The National Reading Panel reviewed 37 studies to determine the efficacy of guided oral reading programs. The results of this meta-analysis found:

- Guided repeated oral reading procedures that included guidance from teachers, peers, or parents had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels and in a variety of settings including regular classroom and special education settings.
- The effectiveness of this approach applied to all students - good readers as well as those experiencing reading difficulties.
- The panel could find no multiyear studies providing information on the relationship between guided oral reading and the emergence of fluency.

Independent Silent Reading

The National Reading Panel reviewed 14 studies to determine the efficacy of independent silent reading programs. A meta-analysis was not conducted but each study was reviewed individually. The results of the review were:

- The Panel was unable to find a positive relationship between programs and instruction in which students engage in independent silent reading with minimal guidance or feedback and improvements in reading achievement, including fluency.
- These findings do not negate the positive influence that independent silent reading may have on reading fluency, nor do the findings negate the possibility that wide independent reading significantly influences vocabulary.

Comprehension

Comprehension is defined as intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader.

Vocabulary Instruction

The National Reading Panel reviewed 50 studies dating from 1979 to the present to determine the efficacy of various vocabulary development programs. A meta-analysis was not conducted but each study was reviewed individually. The results of the review were:

- Vocabulary instruction does lead to gains in comprehension, but the methods must be appropriate to the age and ability of the reader.
- The use of computers in vocabulary instruction was found to be more effective than some traditional methods in a few studies.
- Techniques such as task restructuring and repeated exposure (including having the student encounter words in various contexts) appear to enhance vocabulary development.
- Learning words before reading a text also is helpful.
- Substituting easy words for more difficult words can assist low-achieving students.

Text Comprehension Instruction

The National Reading Panel reviewed 205 studies dating from 1980 to the present to determine the efficacy of various comprehension approaches. A meta-analysis was not conducted but each study was reviewed individually. The results of the review were:

The Panel identified 16 categories of text comprehension instruction of which 7 appear to have a solid scientific basis for concluding that these types of instruction improve comprehension in non-impaired readers.

Some of these types of instruction are helpful when used alone, but many are more effective when used as part of a multiple-strategy method. The types of instruction are:

1. *Comprehension monitoring*, where readers learn how to be aware of their understanding of the material;
 2. *Cooperative learning*, where students learn reading strategies together;
 3. *Use of graphic and semantic organizers (including story maps)*, where readers make graphic representations of the material to assist comprehension;
 4. *Question answering*, where readers answer questions posed by the teacher and receive immediate feedback;
 5. *Question generation*, where readers ask themselves questions about various aspects of the story;
 6. *Story structure*, where students are taught to use the structure of the story as a means of helping them recall story content in order to answer questions about what they have read; and
 7. *Summarization*, where readers are taught to integrate ideas and generalize from the text information.
- Teaching a combination of reading comprehension techniques is the most effective. They assist students in recall, question answering, question generation, and summarization of texts.
 - When used in combination, these techniques can improve results in standardized comprehension tests.
 - The literature also suggests that teaching comprehension in the context of specific academic areas - for example, social studies - can be effective.
 - The review of the studies did not determine at which levels which strategies were most effective.

Teacher Preparation and Comprehension Strategies Instruction

Of 635 studies identified in an initial search of the literature, only four studies met the National Reading Panel research methodology criteria. These four studies were reviewed in detail. The results of the review were:

- Teachers could be instructed in these methods but required instruction in explaining what they are teaching, modeling their thinking processes, encouraging student inquiry, and keeping students engaged.