

Language Comprehension Evidence-Based Practices

What are evidence-based practices?

Evidence-based practices are instructional strategies and approaches grounded in rigorous research and demonstrated to improve student learning outcomes. They rely on data from well-designed studies to solidify whether a practice is effective, rather than intuition. Using evidence-based practices means intentionally selecting methods that have been shown to be effective, implementing those practices with fidelity, and continuously monitoring student learning so adjustments can be made if needed.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) references tiers of evidence, which provides districts and schools with a framework for determining which programs, practices, strategies, and interventions work in which contexts and for which students. This handout, [ESSA Tiers of Evidence](#) (REL Midwest, 2019), provides additional information about the ESSA tiers of evidence and the kinds of studies necessary to determine those evidence tiers.

Why is the use of evidence-based practices important?

The use of evidence-based practices is essential not only for classroom instruction but also for improved student learning, as it ensures that the teaching methods used are proven to support student learning rather than relying on trial and error. When educators use practices and strategies grounded in high-quality research, they are more likely to meet students' diverse needs, reduce achievement gaps, and use instructional time effectively.

Introduction

The Instructional Practices for Literacy documents are designed to mirror the Simple View of Reading presented by Gough and Tunmer in 1986. This reading model has empirical evidence validated in more than 150 studies. The Simple View of Reading is a formula demonstrating the widely accepted view that reading has two basic components: word recognition (decoding) and language comprehension.

Decoding (D) x Language Comprehension (LC) = Reading Comprehension (RC)

While this brief provides exemplar resources, the [Iowa Comprehensive State Literacy Plan](#) offers a more comprehensive set of supports and is recommended for further exploration by educators, leaders, families and caregivers.

Listed resources are examples intended to support educator understanding and implementation and are not intended as an endorsement of a specific program or product.

Practice: Vocabulary Grades K-3

Overview

Explicit vocabulary instruction of content words is imperative to developing students' literacy skills. "The Panel also considered that many studies of vocabulary instruction for native English speakers have found that explicit word meaning instruction improves reading achievement."

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 3 – PROMISING:

- [Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades](#) (Gersten et al., 2007)
- [Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices](#) (Kamil et al., 2008)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing explicit instruction in morphological word parts (roots, prefixes, suffixes)• Providing students with strategies to make them independent vocabulary learners• Using new vocabulary in a variety of contexts through activities such as discussion, writing and extended reading.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning and using new vocabulary• Using new vocabulary when speaking and writing• Using context and strategies to determine word meaning

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Breaking Down New Words Worksheet](#)
- [IRRC Morpheme Lab](#)

Practice: Vocabulary Grades 4+

Overview

Explicit vocabulary instruction of content words is imperative to developing students' literacy skills. "The Panel also considered that many studies of vocabulary instruction for native English speakers have found that explicit word meaning instruction improves reading achievement."

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 3 – PROMISING:

- [Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades](#) (Gersten et al., 2007)
- [Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices](#) (Kamil et al., 2008)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing explicit morpheme instruction (roots, prefixes, suffixes)• Providing repeated exposure to new words in multiple contexts and allowing sufficient practice sessions in vocabulary instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning and using new vocabulary across contexts• Using word parts to determine word meaning• Applying new vocabulary in speaking and writing• Practicing new words through reading and discussion

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Attributes of Effective Explicit Vocabulary Instruction](#)
- [Explicit Vocabulary Instruction Template](#)
- [Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices](#)
- [Secondary Reading Instruction: Teaching Vocabulary and Comprehension in the Content Areas](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Breaking Down New Words Worksheet](#)
- [IRRC Morpheme Lab](#)

Practice: Writing Grades K-6

Overview

Acquiring and improving writing skills requires explicit instruction, frequent practice and effective feedback within a supportive environment. Use a gradual release of responsibility to teach foundational writing skills explicitly. Teach the writing process, and incorporate writing opportunities throughout the day in a variety of contexts.

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 1 – STRONG:

- [Teaching Elementary School Students to be Effective Writers: A Practice Guide](#) (Graham et al., 2012)
- [Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively: A Practice Guide](#) (Graham et al., 2019)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching students foundational skills of good writing (handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing)• Teaching writing skills, strategies and techniques explicitly, using a gradual release of responsibility• Teaching students each phase of the writing process (planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, editing, publishing) and how to use them flexibly and strategically as they write• Integrating writing opportunities throughout each day, across content areas• Introducing students to word processing skills starting in first grade, gradually adding in some of the tools of technology (spell check) as students become more comfortable composing and revising with a word processor• Spelling words phonetically in kindergarten and first grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beginning to spell phonetically in kindergarten and first grade• Beginning in second grade, students should start applying known spelling patterns and review words for spelling accuracy.• Thinking critically about writing (purpose, audience, planning and how to say what they want to say)• Writing for a variety of real-world audiences for a variety of purposes• Emulating characteristics of good writing that have been modeled in mentor texts• Using a word processor to create and revise text by the end of second grade

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Instructional Tips Based on the Educator's Practice Guide](#)
- [Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Assessing Student Writing](#)

Practice: Writing Grades 6-12

Overview

Acquiring and improving writing skills requires explicit instruction, frequent practice and effective feedback within a supportive environment. Teach the writing process, and incorporate writing opportunities throughout the day in a variety of contexts.

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 1 – STRONG:

- [Teaching Elementary School Students to be Effective Writers: A Practice Guide](#) (Graham et al., 2012)
- [Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively: A Practice Guide](#) (Graham et al., 2019)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching appropriate writing strategies using a Model-Practice-Reflect instructional cycle:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Modeling strategies for students○ Providing students with opportunities to apply and practice modeled strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applying writing strategies during practice• Evaluating and reflecting on their own and peers' writing and use of modeled strategies• Revising writing based on feedback

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively](#)
- [Writing to Learn: Writing Strategies for Middle School Matters](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Beginner's Guide to Poetry](#)
- [IRRC Understanding and Responding to Writing Prompts Guide](#)

Practice: Comprehension Grades K-3

Overview

Teach students how to use several research-based reading comprehension strategies (activating prior knowledge/predicting, questioning, visualizing, monitoring, clarifying, fixing up, drawing inferences, summarizing/retelling). Teach reading comprehension strategies individually or in combination. Teach reading comprehension strategies by using a gradual release of responsibility.

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 3 – PROMISING:

- [Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#) (Shanahan et al., 2010)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modeling thinking aloud while reading (predicting, questioning, summarizing)• Teaching one strategy at a time and then combining strategies over time• Using routines (interactive reading, reciprocal teaching) to guide student thinking• Asking questions before, during and after reading to support understanding• Giving feedback and supporting students as they practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listening and following the teacher's thinking during read-alouds• Practicing using strategies with support from the teacher and peers• Answering questions about the text• Talking with others about what they read• Retelling or summarizing key ideas from the text

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Helping Your Students Become Self-Regulated Readers](#)
- [Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Interactive Reading Routine \(Iowa Reading Research Center\)](#)
- [Reciprocal Teaching](#)
- [Seven Strategies to Teach Students Text Comprehension](#)

Practice: Comprehension Grades 4-9

Overview

Routinely use a set of comprehension-building practices to help students make sense of the text. Build students' world and word knowledge so they can make sense of the text. Consistently provide students with opportunities to ask and answer questions to understand the text they read (Right There Question, Think and Search Question, Author and Me Question). Teach students a routine for determining the gist of a short section of text. Teach students to monitor their comprehension as they read.

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 1 – STRONG:

- [Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9](#) (Vaughn et al., 2022)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching students how to find the gist and main ideas in a text• Teaching students how to ask and answer questions about what they read• Building background knowledge and teaching important vocabulary• Modeling how to notice when meaning breaks down and how to fix it• Leading structured discussions to help students understand the text	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finding the gist and main ideas while reading• Identifying key ideas in sections of text• Asking and answering questions to better understand the text• Using what they know and new vocabulary to make meaning• Noticing when they are confused and using strategies to fix it• Talking with others to share and improve their thinking

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Monitor and Mend](#)
- [Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9: Educator's Practice Guide](#)
- [Secondary Reading Instruction: Teaching Vocabulary and Comprehension in the Content Areas](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [IRRC Printable Literacy Resources \(Graphic Organizers & Instructional Supports\)](#)
- [Reciprocal Teaching](#)
- [Seven Strategies to Teach Students Text Comprehension](#)

Practice: Comprehension Grades 5-12

Overview

Select the text carefully to use when beginning to teach a given strategy. Show students how to apply the strategies they are learning to different texts. Make sure the text is appropriate for students' reading levels. Use a direct and explicit instruction lesson plan to teach students how to use comprehension strategies. Provide the appropriate amount of guided practice depending on the difficulty level of the strategies that students are learning. Talk about comprehension strategies while teaching them.

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 3 – PROMISING:

- [*Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*](#) (Kamil et al., 2008)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching students how to use comprehension strategies across texts• Choosing texts that match the strategy being taught• Modeling when and why to use each strategy• Giving guided and independent practice with more complex texts• Leading discussions that ask students to explain their thinking with evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using comprehension strategies with different types of texts• Applying strategies on their own as texts become more complex• Using evidence from the text during discussions• Noticing when they do not understand and adjusting their strategies• Showing understanding by summarizing, explaining and analyzing text

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [*Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*](#)
- [*Teach the Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers*](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [*IRRC Printable Literacy Resources \(Graphic Organizers & Instructional Supports\)*](#)
- [*Reciprocal Teaching*](#)
- [*Seven Strategies to Teach Students Text Comprehension*](#)

Practice: Oral Language & Academic Language Grades K-8

Overview

Integrate oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching. Strategically use instructional tools, such as visual and graphic organizers, to anchor instruction and scaffold learning by enabling the group to organize material around a common text structure, such as a temporal sequence or compare-contrast. Provide opportunities to talk about content in pairs or small groups.

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 1 – STRONG:

- [*Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School*](#) (Baker et al., 2014)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing regular chances for students to talk (Think-Pair-Share, small groups)• Modeling how to use clear and academic language• Using sentence frames and prompts to support student responses• Using visuals and organizers to support understanding• Guiding discussions that connect speaking to content learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taking part in structured discussions with peers• Using clear and academic language to explain their thinking• Building on others' ideas during conversations• Using visuals and organizers to support their thinking• Asking and answering questions to better understand content

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Oral Language Practice Activities](#)
- [Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School](#)
- [Text Structure Reflection](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Structured Academic Talk Strategies: Think-Pair-Share](#)
- [Seven Strategies to Teach Students Text Comprehension](#)

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