

Foundational Reading 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: Print Knowledge Grades Pre-K

Overview

Print Knowledge - [Dialogic Reading](#)

Dialogic Reading is an interactive shared picture-book reading practice designed to enhance young children's language and literacy skills. During the shared reading practice, the adult and the child switch roles so the child learns to be the storyteller, with the assistance of the adult who functions as an active listener and questioner. Two related practices are reviewed in the WWC intervention reports on Interactive Shared Book Reading and Shared Book Reading.

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 3 – PROMISING:

- [Dialog Reading](#) (What Works Clearinghouse, 2007)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acting as a facilitator• Listening, questioning and responding to students• Prompting students to expand their responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acting as a storyteller• Responding to teacher prompts• Participating as a conversational partner

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Dialogic Reading: Having a Conversation about Books](#)
- [Early Childhood Educator Preparation to Support High-Quality Language Instruction - Dialogic Reading](#)
- [Preparing a Dialogic Reading Lesson](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Dialogic Reading: An Effective Way to Read Aloud with Young Children](#)

Practice: Phonological Awareness Grades K-1

Overview

Students' ability to identify rhyme units is essential to phonological awareness. Use rhyming activities to support students who struggle with alliterative and rhyming words or identifying sounds of spoken words.

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 1 – STRONG:

- [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade](#) (Foorman et al., 2016)
- [Project 5.2.4: Evidence-Based Practices for Teaching Phonological and Phonemic Awareness](#) (Nunn et al., 2019)

Predictable progression for the development of Phonological Awareness Skills: [The Development of Phonological Skills](#)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modeling phonological awareness skills• Guiding students to hear and manipulate the sounds of oral language• Using auditory games• Connecting sounds to letters• Using movement and multisensory techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listening actively• Identifying and manipulating sounds• Engaging in auditory and kinesthetic tasks

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Dialogic Reading: Having a Conversation about Books](#)
- [Early Childhood Educator Preparation to Support High-Quality Language Instruction - Dialogic Reading](#)
- [Preparing a Dialogic Reading Lesson](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Dialogic Reading: An Effective Way to Read Aloud with Young Children](#)

Practice: Phonemic Awareness Grades K-1

Overview

Teach students to recognize and manipulate the sounds in words. Use blending and segmenting activities to support students who struggle with blending or segmenting phonemes. Activities may include blending (putting sounds together) and segmenting (pulling sounds apart).

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 1 – STRONG:

- [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade](#) (Foorman et al., 2016)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modeling phonemic awareness skill• Guiding students to hear and manipulate the sounds of oral language• Using auditory games• Using movement and multisensory techniques• Using strategies like stretching sounds, tapping or manipulatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listening actively and repeating sounds in words• Identifying and manipulating sounds• Segmenting words into individual phonemes• Engaging in auditory and kinesthetic tasks

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [eLearning Teaching Students to Map Phonemes to Graphemes Module](#)
- [Elkonin Boxes](#)
- [Phonemic Awareness Instructional Routine: Blending](#)
- [Phonemic Awareness Instructional Routine: Segmenting](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Blending and Segmenting Games](#)

Practice: Phonics Grades K-1

Overview

Teach students to decode words, analyze word parts, and write and recognize words. Teach students to read from left to right, blending the sounds by chunking or sounding out each letter.

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 1 – STRONG:

- [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade](#) (Foorman et al., 2016)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing explicit, systematic instruction in phoneme-grapheme connections in words • Connecting words to phoneme-grapheme mapping, guiding students to analyze sounds and letter patterns • Using decodable texts that align with taught phonics patterns to support accurate word reading • Delivering frequent, corrective feedback and cumulative review to strengthen automaticity and prevent guessing habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping sounds to letters in words • Reading decodable and connected text using taught phonics patterns to build accuracy and automaticity • Applying phonics knowledge during reading, avoiding guessing and using decoding strategies to confirm words

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Reading Rockets Basic Phonics and Decoding](#)
- [Reading Universe Phonics Lessons](#)
- [Matching Books to Phonics Features](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Letter Cube Blending](#)
- [Make-A-Word](#)
- [Word Steps](#)

Practice: Phonics and Fluency Grades K-3

Overview

Phonics: Teach students to decode and encode words, analyze word parts, and write and recognize words. Instruct students in common sound-spelling patterns, including consonant, vowel and syllable construction patterns. Teach students to recognize common word parts. Teach students to isolate and identify word parts. Breaking the words into smaller, meaningful word parts helps students read more challenging words.

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 1 – STRONG:

- [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade](#) (Foorman et al., 2016)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing explicit, systematic instruction in phoneme-grapheme connections in words • Connecting words to phoneme-grapheme mapping, guiding students to analyze sounds and letter patterns • Using decodable texts that align with taught phonics patterns to support accurate word reading • Delivering frequent, corrective feedback and cumulative review to strengthen automaticity and prevent guessing habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping sounds to letters in words • Reading decodable and connected text using taught phonics patterns to build accuracy and automaticity • Applying phonics knowledge during reading, avoiding guessing and using decoding strategies to confirm words. • Rereading decodable books to support automaticity and fluency

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Instructional Routine - Identify Base Words and Affixes](#)
- [Instructional Routine - Identify Base Words and Suffixes](#)
- [Syllable Games](#)
- [Teaching Consonant Digraphs](#)
- [Understanding Compound Words Through Their Two Word Parts](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [A Digraph A Word](#)
- [Affix Hunt](#)
- [Silent “e” Changes](#)
- [Syllables, Words, and Pictures](#)

Practice: Fluency Grades K-3

Overview

Ensure that each student reads connected text every day to support reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Provide opportunities for oral reading practice with feedback to develop accurate reading with expression. Model expression and phrasing in fluent reading, and provide opportunities for repeated reading.

MODERATE EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 2 – MODERATE:

- [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade](#) (Foorman et al., 2016)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modeling fluent reading by demonstrating appropriate pacing, expression and phrasing during read-alouds• Providing daily opportunities for students to read connected text at their instructional level• Listening to students read aloud and giving immediate, specific feedback to support accuracy and expression• Planning repeated reading activities (echo reading, choral reading) to build fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading connected text daily to build accuracy, fluency and comprehension• Practicing reading aloud with expression and appropriate phrasing• Rereading familiar texts to improve smoothness and confidence• Applying teacher feedback to improve accuracy, pacing and expression during reading

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Choral Reading](#)
- [Instructional Routine - Reading Text with Appropriate Phrasing and Proper Expression](#)
- [Paired Reading](#)
- [Repeated Reading with Goal Setting for Reading Fluency](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Reading Universe Fluency Activities](#)

Practice: Fluency Grades 4+

Overview

Ensure that students engage in daily reading of increasingly complex, grade-level texts to strengthen fluency, comprehension and overall reading stamina. Provide structured opportunities for oral reading with targeted feedback to support accuracy, appropriate pacing and expression. Model fluent reading, including phrasing and intonation, and incorporate repeated reading and performance-based activities to deepen understanding and build confidence with more advanced texts.

MODERATE EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 3 – MODERATE:

- [*WWC review of this study: A randomized experiment of a mixed-method literacy intervention for struggling readers in grades 4–6: Effects on word reading efficiency, reading comprehension and vocabulary, and oral reading fluency \[READ 180 vs. business as usual\]*](#) (What Works Clearinghouse, 2021.)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modeling fluent reading of complex, grade-level text, demonstrating appropriate pacing, phrasing and expression• Providing structured opportunities for oral reading, including partner reading, small groups or whole-class practice• Giving specific, timely feedback to support accuracy, rate and prosody• Selecting and revisiting meaningful texts for repeated reading to build fluency and deepen comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading grade-level texts daily, both independently and aloud, to build stamina and confidence• Practicing oral reading with peers or in small groups, applying appropriate pacing and expression• Rereading familiar texts to improve accuracy and understanding• Using feedback to adjust reading, demonstrating improved fluency, phrasing and comprehension over time

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [CommonLit](#)
- [Florida Center for Reading Research](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Reading Universe](#)
- [ReadWorks](#)

Practice: Decoding 4+

Overview

Build students' decoding skills so they can read complex multisyllabic words. Identify the level of students' word-reading skills and teach skills as needed. Teach students a routine they can use to decode multisyllabic words. Embed spelling instruction in lessons. Provide opportunities for students to practice reading multisyllabic words fluently.

STRONG EVIDENCE - ESSA TIER 1 – STRONG:

- [*Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade*](#) (Foorman et al., 2016)

What are teachers doing?	What are students doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modeling how to break multisyllabic words into syllables and identify prefixes, suffixes and roots Providing explicit instruction on morphology, including common Greek and Latin roots Thinking aloud while decoding unfamiliar words during reading Giving targeted feedback and guided practice using grade-level texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breaking unfamiliar words into meaningful parts (prefix, root, suffix) to decode and determine meaning Applying syllable types and patterns to read multisyllabic words accurately Using context along with word analysis to confirm pronunciation and meaning Practicing decoding strategies independently during reading and writing tasks

Resources to Support Educator Understanding

- [Instructional Practices to Promote Multisyllabic Word Reading Fluency](#)
- [Instructional Routine: Identify base words and suffixes](#)
- [Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9](#)
- [Reading Rockets](#)
- [Root Words, Roots and Affixes](#)

Tools to Support Implementation

- [Reading Universe](#)
- [Morpheme Structure: Root Hoot](#)

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Resources

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