PLANTING THE SEEDS OF READING COMPREHENSION USING THE FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS
Planting the Seeds of Reading Comprehension:
Teaching the Foundations of Reading

D. Ray Reutzel, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Education at the University of Wyoming
President, Reading Hall of Fame

#ReadReady
Introduction

1. Concepts about Print
2. Letter Recognition
3. Phonological Awareness
4. Phonics
5. Word Recognition
6. Oral Reading Fluency

#ReadReady
Introduction

Reading foundational skills allow a child’s reading comprehension to blossom.
Teaching...

Concepts about Print

#ReadReady
Children acquire print awareness from seeing print around them, having books shared with them, and seeing print used in everyday life.
What is it?

Recognizing how print works and what to look at when reading a page:
• Print, not pictures
• Left-to-right and top-to-bottom directionality
• Punctuation marks
• Letters, words, bolded print
Why does it matter?

• As children learn to read, they need to develop clear understandings about basic print concepts and book handling.

• They need to be able to connect these concepts to the terms used to refer to them.

• In 2008, the Report of the National Early Literacy Panel identified concepts about print as one of 10 variables that were predictive of later reading proficiency.
Where do children acquire print awareness?

• From seeing print used around them, having books shared with them, and seeing print used in everyday life.

• Environmental print is useful in teaching concepts about print.

• Children from middle class homes arrive at first grade having experienced 1,000 to 1,700 hours of one-on-one storybook reading as well as another 1,000 hours of print experience in their homes and communities.

• By comparison, children coming to first grade from homes below the poverty level typically have experienced only 25 hours of storybook reading and less than 200 hours of general guidance about the forms and nature of print.
I can read books using environmental print such as My favorite foods, I Spy: Signs I See, A trip to the Supermarket
A plain wooden dowel will hold children’s attention as a pointer, without distracting them from the task at hand.
Once upon a time there was a little red hen who shared a big red cottage with a goose, cat, and

Fixed or sliding print frames direct children’s eyes during shared reading to the print on the page.
Teaching Tips That Work

Highlighting

Colored, transparent highlighter tape and arrows direct young students to the features of print under study.

#ReadReady
Teaching Tips That Work

Sentence Strips

The cat napped on the chair.

Sentence strips featuring text from a shared reading can be a focal point for instruction in print concepts.

#ReadReady
Teaching...

Letter Recognition

#ReadReady
“Children who enter kindergarten knowing many letter names tend to have an easier time learning to read than do children who have not learned these skills.”

–Early Childhood–Head Start Taskforce
Teaching Tips That Work

- Consider teaching the letters in alphabetical order.
- Use children’s names to support letter recognition.
- Get an early start on reading words.
- Don’t forget to have children write letters.
- “One a Day” helps children learn their letters.
- Some letters need more instruction and practice than others.
- Remember to use a combination of learning activities.

#ReadReady
Support for Letter Learning

Activities that support forming letters
Support for Letter Learning

Activities that involve discriminating letters and matching upper and lowercase of the same letter

#ReadReady
Support for Letter Learning

Activities that ask children to recognize the letter that stands for a sound in a pictured word.
Teaching Concepts of Print and Letter Recognition

Questions?
Teaching...

Phonological Awareness

#ReadReady
Research shows that young children must develop phonological and phonemic awareness to learn to read proficiently.
Phonological and phonemic awareness involve the understanding that spoken language can be broken down into smaller units such as sentences, phrases, words, syllables, onsets, rimes, and phonemes (sounds).
Phonological awareness proceeds in steps.

**Step 1.** The perception of individual words in spoken language

**Step 2.** The discernment of the syllables within spoken words

**Step 3.** The awareness that spoken syllables are made up of onsets (all the sounds in the syllable *before* the vowel) and rimes (the vowel sound in a syllable and every sound following it)

**Step 4.** The awareness of individual sounds, or phonemes, in spoken words

**Step 5.** The ability to manipulate (delete and substitute) individual sounds in spoken words
Remember the difference between phonological and phonemic awareness.

**Phonological awareness** is a much broader term that pertains to hearing and manipulating units of spoken language such as words, syllables, and rhyming elements.

**Phonemic awareness** pertains specifically to the ability to hear and manipulate individual or single phonemes in spoken words and syllables.
These kinds of learning activities are effective:

1. Foster motivation to learn in an atmosphere of playfulness and fun.
2. Encourage interaction among children through group activities.
3. Curiosity about language and experimentation should be encouraged. Try spoonerisms where you exchange initial sounds in two words, for example, “Once upon a time, deep in the woods, there lived a family of bee threars (three bears).” Almost always, children will hear these changes and want to correct the teacher’s reading!
Teaching Tips That Work

These kinds of learning activities are effective.

4. Be prepared for differences among students in their developmental acquisition of phonemic awareness.

5. Quickly move from PA instruction only to including PA linked with letters (phonics), as this is particularly effective.

6. Use digital games and technologies to help students match sounds to pictures and eventually to letters to provide much-needed practice and feedback on their ability to hear individual sounds in spoken words.
Teaching Tips That Work

Spend enough time, but not too much, on phonemic awareness

• Use assessment tools to determine areas of need and save time.
• Teach up to 18 hours of instruction total, but not more (National Reading Panel, 2000).
• Short lessons work best (five minutes or less).
• Focus on one or two PA skills at a time.
Teaching Tips That Work

Instructional time in kindergarten is best spent on blending and segmenting tasks.

- Have children practice counting words
- Practice breaking words into syllables
- Onsets and Rimes/Body and Coda
- Practice categorizing, removing, adding, and substituting sounds
Teaching Phonological and Phonemic Awareness
Teaching...

Phonics

#ReadReady
Developing an understanding of the alphabetic principle is a major achievement that allows students to learn to decode and spell printed words using phonics.
Teaching Tips That Work

5 Effective Approaches to Support Phonics Instruction

1. **Synthetic Phonics:**
   Explicit instruction and practice activities focus on discrete letter-sound relationships, strategies for blending sounds, and decoding words.
Teaching Tips That Work

5 Effective Approaches to Support Phonics Instruction

1. Synthetic Phonics:
Explicit instruction and practice activities focus on discrete letter–sound relationships, strategies for blending sounds, and decoding words.

Students earn Decoder Cards as they learn sound-spellings.
5 Effective Approaches to Support Phonics Instruction

2 **Embedded Phonics:** Through context sentences and highly decodable texts, students practice applying their phonics knowledge as they read connected texts. Every i-Ready Phonics lesson provides opportunities for students to focus on the target skill in texts that help them make meaning of the words they’re learning to decode.
5 Effective Approaches to Support Phonics Instruction

2 **Embedded Phonics:** Through context sentences and highly decodable texts, students practice applying their phonics knowledge as they read connected texts. Every *i-Ready* Phonics lesson provides opportunities for students to focus on the target skill in texts that help them make meaning of the words they’re learning to decode.

*This informational text is part of a Grade 1 *i-Ready* Phonics lesson.*
Teaching Tips That Work

5 Effective Approaches to Support Phonics Instruction

3 Analogy-Based Phonics: Students learn to use known word families and word patterns to identify unknown words in playful word-building, sorting, and comparative activities.
5 Effective Approaches to Support Phonics Instruction

3 Analogy-Based Phonics: Students learn to use known word families and word patterns to identify unknown words in playful word-building, sorting, and comparative activities.

In this activity, students sort words by identifying which share the same target elements.
Teaching Tips That Work

5 Effective Approaches to Support Phonics Instruction

Analytic Phonics:
These activities support students in identifying phonetic patterns or in discriminating between them.
4. Phonics

Teaching Tips That Work

5 Effective Approaches to Support Phonics Instruction

4. Analytic Phonics:
These activities support students in identifying phonetic patterns or in discriminating between them.

In this activity, students distinguish between the end blend st and the ck spelling for the /k/ sound.
Teaching Tips That Work

5 Effective Approaches to Support Phonics Instruction

Phonics through Spelling: Students practice choosing letters to spell words in isolation, as well as working with spelling patterns within the context of sentences.
Teaching Tips That Work

5 Effective Approaches to Support Phonics Instruction

5 Phonics through Spelling: Students practice choosing letters to spell words in isolation, as well as working with spelling patterns within the context of sentences.

In this spelling activity, students practice working with spelling patterns within the context of sentences.
Model sequential blending of single-syllable words.

To blend the letter sounds in the word *sip*:

1. Say the sound that stands for each letter.

![sip sip sip]
Model sequential blending of single-syllable words.

To blend the letter sounds in the word *sip*:

1. Say the sound that stands for each letter.

2. Stretch the sounds: /sssiiip/
Model sequential blending of single-syllable words.

To blend the letter sounds in the word *sip*:

1. Say the sound that stands for each letter.

   1. **sip**
   2. **sip**
   3. **sip**

2. Stretch the sounds: */sssiiip*/

3. Blend the sounds to say the word.

#ReadReady
Teaching Tips That Work

Model hierarchical blending of multiple syllable words.

To blend the syllables in the word *trumpet*:

1. Find the first syllable and look for the vowel.
Model hierarchical blending of multiple syllable words.

To blend the syllables in the word *trumpet*:

1. Find the first syllable and look for the vowel.

2. Do the same with the next syllable or syllables.
Teaching Tips That Work

Model hierarchical blending of multiple syllable words.

To blend the syllables in the word *trumpet*:

1. Find the first syllable and look for the vowel.

2. Do the same with the next syllable or syllables.

3. Say each syllable.
Model hierarchical blending of multiple syllable words.

To blend the syllables in the word *trumpet*:

1. Find the first syllable and look for the vowel.
2. Do the same with the next syllable or syllables.
3. Say each syllable.
4. Put the syllables together to say the word.
Teaching Tips That Work

Model sequential segmenting of single-syllable words.

1. Look at letters in the word.

#ReadReady
Model sequential segmenting of single-syllable words.

1. Look at letters in the word.

2. Stretch the word to hear each sound.
Teaching Tips That Work

Model sequential segmenting of single-syllable words.

1. Look at letters in the word.

2. Stretch the word to hear each sound.

3. Say one sound at a time.
Model hierarchical segmenting of multiple-syllable words.

To blend the syllables in the word *trumpet*:

1. Find the first syllable in the word.
Teaching Tips That Work

Model hierarchical segmenting of multiple-syllable words.

To blend the syllables in the word *trumpet*:

1. Find the first syllable in the word.

2. Say the word. Clap after the first syllable.
Model hierarchical segmenting of multiple-syllable words.

To blend the syllables in the word *trumpet*:

1. Find the first syllable in the word.

2. Say the word. Clap after the first syllable.

3. Then say the next syllable.
Teaching Phonics

Questions?
Teaching...

Word Recognition

#ReadReady
Learning to recognize a small set of words called high-frequency words easily will get most children about 50 percent of the way toward early automatic and fluent word recognition.
Why It Matters

In 1944, Thorndike and Lorge conducted word frequency counts of 4.5 million words taken from American magazine articles. They found that 25 words accounted for 1.5 million words of the total 4.5 million, or roughly 33 percent of the words an adult would read.

Learning to recognize a small set of words called high-frequency words easily will get most children about 50 percent of the way toward early automatic and fluent word recognition (Zeno, Ivens, Millard, & Duvvuri, 1995). For example, the word *the* occurs roughly 5 percent of the time in most English texts written for the adult population. Once children can effortlessly recognize the word *the*, they have mastered 5 percent of all the reading they will ever do as adults!
Teaching Tips That Work

Teaching irregular words by sight.
Use the five-step sight word method:

1. See the word.
2. Say the word.
3. Spell the word.
4. Write the word.
5. Check the word.
Teach the drastic strategy.
Teaching Tips That Work

Teach the drastic strategy.

1. Dictate the word *the*.

2. Have the children write the word using lapboards, whiteboards, and another type of writing surface.

3. Ask for choral responses showing the children’s dictations after writing each word.

4. Watch for children who copy from others, and make quick notes about those who are not able to write words from dictation for follow-up instruction.

5. Write the word on a 3” x 5” unlined card. Students cut the word into its letters. Students scramble the letters to spell the word three times.

#ReadReady
Teaching...

Oral Reading Fluency

#ReadReady
It is important to emphasize that there is no reading comprehension without reading fluency.
What is it?

Reading fluency has the following features:

1. accurate, effortless, and automatic word identification (i.e., requiring little conscious attention)
2. appropriate age- or grade-level reading speed or reading rate
3. appropriate use of expression or prosody in the voice when reading aloud
4. correct text phrasing, sometimes called chunking.
Why It Matters

It is important to emphasize that there is no reading comprehension without reading fluency. LaBerge and Samuels’s (1974) automaticity theory explains how reading fluency works. Automaticity implies that the human mind is limited in its ability to shift attention between decoding and comprehending. If readers get too bogged down in decoding and word recognition, they will not be able to pay attention to the author’s message. Consequently, students must become automatic decoders and word recognizers to be able to shift the majority of their attention to comprehending a text.
Teaching Tips That Work

Model fluent reading.

Use repeated oral reading.
There are several common formats for choral readings of text.

**Choral Reading Formats:**

**Unison Reading:** Everyone reads together.

**Echo Reading:** The teacher or a student reads a passage aloud and then everyone else “echoes” by repeating it.

**Antiphonal Reading:** Two groups take turns reading passages aloud (usually a sentence or two).

**Reading in Rounds:** Groups read simultaneously but not in unison, starting at different times on a staggered schedule.
Teaching Tips That Work

Choose texts with fewer unfamiliar words.

Have children practice and perform reader’s theatre.
Teaching Word Recognition and Oral Reading Fluency

Questions?

#ReadReady
Conclusion

• Plant a seed, and the first thing you see will be a tiny sprout.
• A good gardener knows that this is the beginning of the development of a beautiful flower.
• Sunlight, water, and fertilizer help the flower grow.
• Our classroom gardeners get the best results when they use the right tools and methods.
Planting the Seeds of Reading Comprehension: Teaching the Foundations of Reading

A position paper describing the latest research on foundational reading skills instruction for young children, with strategies to support teaching in the classroom.

D. Ray Reutzel, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Education at the University of Wyoming
President, Reading Hall of Fame

About the Author

D. Ray Reutzel, Ph.D.
Ray is the Dean of the College of Education at the University of Wyoming and President of the Reading Hall of Fame.

Dr. Reutzel is the author of more than 250 published research reports, articles, books, book chapters, and monographs in reading, early literacy, and early childhood education and has received more than $16 million dollars in research and program development funding. His research on early literacy in grades K-3 earned him a Special Recognition Award for Lifetime Contributions to Literacy in Utah. Ray is also a member of the iReady Text Advisory Committee.

Introducing... Research has clarified the need to begin instruction of foundational reading skills in the earliest years to prepare children for proficient reading.

As any primary gardener knows, every seed planted in the garden will not sprout. A good gardener is always prepared for the same results and is willing to keep trying. The acquisition of foundational reading skills is no different. Early readers are like young gardners growing their own reading skills. Their success depends on a well-planned approach to instruction and an understanding of the research and development of reading.

Reading foundational skills are a part of every child’s psychological development, and the growth of these skills during the early years is just as important as the growth of children’s physical development. The first three years of life are a window of opportunity to teach foundational skills in a way that will lay the groundwork for lifelong learning.