

# Essential Components and Conditions for Effective Reading Instruction

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Scientifically based reading strategies and best practices work for **all** students, including those students living in high-poverty, low-performing school communities and those served by special education. The beginning reading program must apply research based instructional curriculum sequences, strategies, assessments, and classroom management designs to impact **all** learners.

Children, regardless of income level or home environment, can learn to read by the end of third grade. Current research on exemplary high-poverty schools' effective practices in reading has identified characteristics of schools and classrooms that have made significant progress in helping all students learn to read. Teachers across different states and local school districts have demonstrated that sound, scientifically based reading instruction can and does work with all children. Schools and classrooms will be expected to draw upon this research in implementing evidence-based practices that follow an instructional design where the needs of all students drive instructional practices and modifications to these practices.

The following essential components highlight scientifically based reading research (SBRR) practices that when followed, will significantly improve reading instruction and achievement outcomes for all children.

- High expectations for reading achievement and formal reading instruction, beginning with the first quarter of kindergarten.
- Sufficient instructional time for all student needs.
- Careful lesson planning, linked to research-based practices.
- School-wide assessment system providing an ongoing monitoring of every student.
- School-wide, ongoing interventions for struggling readers, linked to the assessment system.
- Sound instructional approaches using research-based curriculum and pedagogy.
- School climate of collaboration, strong leadership, commitment to **all** students.
- High-quality, professional development, validated by student outcomes.

Reading First instruction will require teachers to implement a program of direct, systematic instruction in all five essentials of reading, utilizing the following specific practices.



## Phonemic Awareness Instruction

- Provide explicit and systematic instruction, focusing on the most important phonemic awareness skills, such as segmenting and blending.
- Use systematic, instructional assessments on specific phonemic awareness skills to inform instruction.
- Link sounds to letter symbols early, even before learning letter names.

## Phonics and Word Study Instruction

- Provide explicit, systematic, phonics instruction that teaches a set of letter-sound relations.
- Provide explicit instruction in blending sounds to read words.
- Include practice in reading texts that are written for students to immediately apply phonics knowledge to the decoding and comprehension of text.
- Give substantial practice in the application of phonics to the spelling of words.

- Use systematic, classroom-based, instructional assessments of phonics and decoding skills to immediately adjust instruction.

## Fluency Instruction

- Provide opportunities for oral, repeated reading that include support and feedback from teachers, peers, and parents.
- Match text and instruction to individual students.
- Apply systematic, classroom-based, instructional assessment to monitor fluency, rate, and accuracy.

## Text Comprehension Instruction

- Provide comprehension instruction before, during, and after reading narrative and expository texts.
- Explicitly explain, model, and teach comprehension strategies, such as previewing and summarizing text.
- Promote discourse by asking questions and encouraging students to develop questions to demonstrate comprehension.
- Provide extended opportunities for English language learners to participate successfully.
- Use ongoing, systematic, classroom-based, instructional assessment to inform comprehension instruction.

## Vocabulary Instruction

- Provide direct, explicit instruction in the meanings of words and in word learning strategies, particularly morphological skills.
- Provide many opportunities for students to read—both in and out of school.
- Engage children in daily interactions that apply new vocabulary in both oral and written language.
- Enrich and expand the vocabulary knowledge of English Language Learners.

- Actively involve students in making connections between concepts and words.

## Classroom Management

In addition to the five above-listed curriculum components of reading, teachers must implement the following features and conditions of effective instruction.

## Grouping Practices

- Use small, same-ability groups, continually monitor student progress, and regroup to reflect ongoing changes in students' knowledge and skills.
- Use flexible grouping that provides opportunities for students to be members of more than one group.
- Alternate grouping formats for different instructional purposes and to meet students' needs.

- When students experience difficulty, immediately reteach knowledge and skills that have the highest impact on learning to read.

## Maximizing Student Learning

- Actively engage students in reading instruction for at least 90 minutes per day.
- Reduce teacher talk and vary presentation, format, and ways students can participate in instruction. The most “at risk” students should have the most opportunities to practice, successfully demonstrate skills, and receive recognition.
- Use appropriate, challenging instructional materials, including decodable texts.
- Adapt the pacing, content, and emphasis of instruction for individuals and groups of children, including English Language Learners and those having difficulty learning to read.

## Conclusion

With the Reading First interventions, reading failure in the primary grades can be reduced to less than 10%, and the referral for special education services can be reduced by 50%.

Staff development must ensure that teachers have, and can successfully implement, all the necessary tools to provide coherent, skills-based, reading instruction for all students, including second-language learners and students at risk for being inappropriately referred to special education.

## Summary of Characteristics of Effective Reading Programs

- Instructional content based on the five essential components of reading.
- Coherent instructional design that includes explicit instructional strategies, coordinated instructional sequences, ample practice opportunities, and aligned student materials.
- Ongoing use of assessments that inform instructional decisions and guide immediate, instructional adjustments for all students.
- Protected, dedicated, 90-minute block of time for daily reading instruction.
- Clear expectations for student achievement and clear strategies for monitoring progress with weekly measures of individual progress.
- Homogeneous, small-group instruction, as appropriate, to meet individual student needs, with placement and movement across groups, based on ongoing assessments.
- Active student engagement in reading-related activities, which apply, to the five components of reading.
- Instruction which is systematically and progressively improved to bring all children to grade level.

*Editors note: How does your district/school reading program align with research-based, Reading First strategies and mandates? All issues of The Utah Special Educator will address the five essential reading components, one per issue, and highlight schools, programs and teachers that successfully apply these best practice criteria. A compilation of current and future articles in this reading series can be found at [www.updc.org/specialeducator/index.html](http://www.updc.org/specialeducator/index.html)* ■

