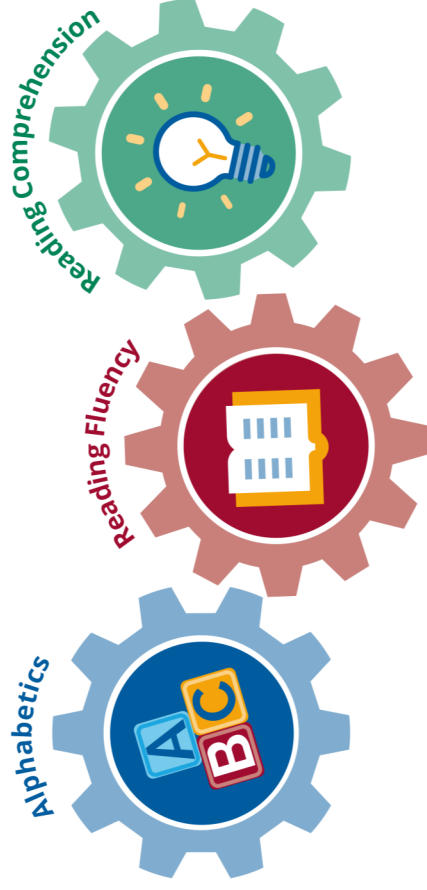




On course for reading success: Best practices for teaching beginning readers

The early literacy skills that students develop set them on course to gain reading proficiency by **grade 3**, which is a strong indicator of later academic success.

This quick reference draws on **What Works Clearinghouse™ practice guides** to identify research-based instructional practices for supporting beginning readers, along with the level of evidence behind the practices and core literacy skills to target for early screening and progress monitoring.



Research shows that beginning readers need to master many skills in multiple domains to be proficient in reading. Three important reading domains are **alphabets**, **reading fluency**, and **reading comprehension**.¹

Learn more

What Works Clearinghouse practice guides

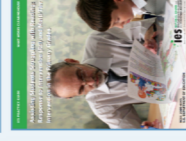


The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) reviews the research on programs, products, practices, and policies to answer the question, *“What works in education?”*

The following WWC practice guides were developed by national reading experts and are helpful for teachers, interventionists, principals, and district leaders seeking evidence-based best practices in reading instruction.



Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade



Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention (Rt) and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades

Related Practice Guide:



Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade: A Practice Guide

Alphabetics

Ability to identify and manipulate units of oral language, identify letters, and apply an understanding of letter-sound relationships to correctly pronounce written words.

Evidence-based practices for core reading instruction:¹

Recommendation: Develop awareness of the segments of sound in speech and how they link to letters.² WWC Level of Evidence: Strong / ESSA Tier 1

- Teach students to recognize and manipulate segments of sound in speech.
- Teach students letter-sound relations.
- Use word-building and other activities to link students' knowledge of letter-sound relationships with phonemic awareness.

Recommendation: Teach students to decode words, analyze word parts, and write and recognize words. WWC Level of Evidence: Strong / ESSA Tier 1

- Teach students to blend letter sounds and sound-spelling patterns from left to right within a word to produce a recognizable pronunciation.
- **Instruct** students in common sound-spelling patterns.
- Teach students to recognize common word parts.
- Have students read decodable words in isolation and in text.
- Teach regular and irregular high-frequency words so that students can recognize them efficiently.
- **Introduce** non-decodable words that are essential to the meaning of the text as whole words.

Skills to target for early screening and progress monitoring:²

- Letter naming fluency
- Phoneme segmentation
- Nonsense word fluency
- Word identification

Reading fluency

Ability to read text accurately, automatically, and with expression, including appropriate pauses and response to punctuation, while gaining meaning.

Evidence-based practices for core reading instruction:¹

Recommendation: Ensure that each student reads connected text every day to support accuracy and fluency. WWC Level of Evidence: Moderate / ESSA Tier 2

- As students read orally, **model** strategies, **scaffold**, and **provide** feedback to **support accurate and efficient word identification**.
- **Teach** students to self-monitor their understanding of the text and to self-correct word-reading errors.
- **Provide** opportunities for oral reading practice with feedback to develop fluent and accurate reading with expression.

Skills to target for early screening and progress monitoring:²

- Oral reading fluency (also called passage reading fluency).

Reading comprehension

Ability to understand the meaning of text, including the ability to decode words, understand word meanings, and interpret language.

Evidence-based practices for core reading instruction:¹

Recommendation: Teach students academic language skills, including the use of inferential and narrative language, and vocabulary knowledge. WWC Level of Evidence: Minimal / ESSA Tier 4

- **Engage** students in conversations that support the use and comprehension of inferential language.
- Explicitly **engage** students in developing narrative language skills.
- **Teach** academic vocabulary in the context of other reading activities.

Skills to target for early screening and progress monitoring:²

- Vocabulary and oral language
- Passage comprehension

Related resources

REL and WWC resources for supporting young learners' reading at home:

- REL Midwest [video on classroom strategies for integrating play into literacy instruction](#)
- REL Southeast [Kindergarten Teacher's Guide to Supporting Family Involvement in Foundational Reading Skills](#)
- REL Southeast [family activities and videos for kindergarten through grade 3](#)
- What Works Clearinghouse [Tips for Supporting Reading Skills at Home](#)

Endnotes

- 1 [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#)
- 2 [Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention \(RtI\) and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades](#)

This document was produced by the **Midwest Early Childhood Education Research Alliance at Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest**. [Learn more.](#)

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See the **What Works Clearinghouse** for early reading programs and interventions shown to have a positive impact on children's development of skills in [alphabetics](#), [reading fluency](#), and [reading comprehension](#).

