



Shotton Hall
Research School

TOWN END
ASSOCIATE
RESEARCH SCHOOL

5 MINUTES ON...

EARLY READING

Poor old Fox
Has lost his socks.



What is reading and how does it develop?

The journey to skilled reading

Learning to read is an important and usually exciting journey for children. Many children will progress very quickly, while others will find learning to read a harder and slower journey. However, the evidence is clear that just about every single pupil can learn to read effectively.¹

The choices that teachers make will influence how likely pupils are to succeed with reading. This short guide aims to help teachers understand how reading develops, with an explicit focus on early reading. If teachers know more about how reading develops then they can make better choices about the activities used in the classroom. There are many different models of reading, including the Simple View of Reading, Scarborough's Reading Rope and the Education Endowment Foundation's Reading House.^{2,3} Each of these models highlights the different components of reading and some attempt to show how the different components interact.

The diagram below summarises The Active View of Reading model, which identifies factors that contribute to successful reading.⁴ These factors are grouped into four families: word recognition, bridging processes, comprehension and active self-regulation. When thinking about this model, it is helpful to remember the following key ideas.

- > **Reading is complicated.** Each of the components in the model influences pupils' reading. Eventually, pupils need to master each of the different components. However, it helps to isolate the different components so that pupils can practise them. Eventually, pupils need to be able to integrate the different processes and developing active self-regulation supports this process.
- > **Prioritisation and repetition.** While all the different aspects of reading matter, there is not good research evidence about the precise sequence in which these things are developed. Although all aspects are important for reading, it also does not mean they all require the same amount of learning time as some can be developed relatively rapidly. Further, although word recognition is an important aspect of early reading, it is still possible to develop language comprehension while this is happening. A valuable question to consider – especially for struggling readers – is what is the best next step in development?
- > **Variety of activities.** No single approach is sufficient to develop reading: pupils need a rich range of activities to develop the different components of early reading. If teachers have strong mental models of how reading develops, then they can intelligently focus their activities. Deep knowledge of reading development allows teachers to move from an activity-led to a purpose-led approach.

Reading		
Word Recognition	Bridging Processes	Language Comprehension
Phonological awareness Hearing and manipulating the sounds of spoken words.	Print concepts Knowing how print works, including the direction of reading, the difference between letters and words, and the function of punctuation.	Cultural and other content knowledge The background information and experiences that help readers make sense of texts, including knowledge of genres and vocabulary.
Alphabetic principle Knowing that letters represent sounds and that these sounds can be combined to form words.	Fluency Reading accurately, quickly, and with expression and comprehension.	Reading-specific background knowledge The prior knowledge that readers have about a specific text or topic that helps them understand what they read.
Phonics knowledge Knowing the relationships between letters and sounds and how to use them to decode words.	Vocabulary knowledge Knowing the meanings and pronunciations of words used in oral and written language.	Verbal reasoning Analysing and evaluating information, including linking together pieces of information.
Decoding skills Associating graphemes and phonemes and blending them to produce a word.	Morphological awareness Awareness of the smallest units of meaning in words.	Text structure and conventions Understanding the organisation and features of different text types.
Sight-recognition of words Recognising words fast without the need to sound them out or using other strategies	Letter-sound-meaning flexibility Considering and actively switching between different plausible meanings.	Theory of mind Thinking about characters' mental states, including thoughts, feelings and intentions.

Reading

Active Self-Regulation

Motivation and engagement

Motivation involves expecting value in and having interest in reading. Motivation supports engagement.

Executive functions

Planning, organising, focusing, remembering and regulating emotions.

Strategy use

Deliberate goal directed actions to improve reading by decoding words and making meaning from the text.

Diving Deeper into Phonological Awareness

If teachers have strong mental models of how reading develops, then they can intelligently focus their activities. Deep knowledge of reading development allows teachers to move from an activity-led to a purpose-led approach. The Active View of Reading identifies many different components of reading. However, it is possible to go deeper into each of these elements. Some elements, like print concepts and the alphabetical principle, are relatively simple, while others are more complex. We can explore the depth behind each of the components by diving deeper into phonological awareness as an example.

Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds of spoken words. There is compelling evidence that phonological awareness is a good long-term predictor of pupils' reading success.⁵ As phonological awareness develops, pupils become increasingly able to hear and manipulate smaller and smaller units of sound until they master phonemic awareness, as shown in the diagram.⁶ For each of these units of sound pupils can learn to manipulate them in different ways, including blending, segmenting, isolating, substituting, adding and deleting.

A very wide range of different activities can play a role in developing phonological awareness.⁷ The DfE's validated phonics programmes all include activities designed to develop phonemic awareness. Historically, there has been some debate about teaching phonics systematically before pupils have well-developed phonological awareness. However, the DfE's report, The Reading Framework, argues that it is easier for pupils to identify phonemes in words if they know how they correspond with letters since letters provide a concrete symbol for sounds.¹ The letters can become anchors around which phonemic awareness is developed and refined.

Listening to and joining in with stories, poems, rhymes and songs

Phonological Awareness

The ability to hear and manipulate sounds

Units of sound

Word awareness

Syllable

Onset-rime

Rhyme

Phonemic awareness

Types of manipulation

Segmentation

Substitution

Blending

Addition

Isolation

Deletion

Difficulties with phonological awareness

Most pupils will develop good phonological awareness by around the age of four or five through the rich variety of activities typically used in primary schools. Many systematic phonics programmes also have specific activities designed to refine phonemic awareness. However, some pupils will persist to have difficulties with phonemic awareness – this can even continue into secondary school.

A variety of factors can influence phonological and phonemic awareness, including the presence of hearing difficulties. If teachers notice that pupils seem to have difficulties with hearing – perhaps by not responding when not looking at a teacher, then it is advisable to investigate this further. If pupils appear to still be struggling with early reading, it is worth taking the time to undertake a detailed assessment of their phonological and phonemic awareness.

The list of tasks below was developed by the Education Endowment Foundation to show they kinds of activities that can be undertaken one-to-one with a child to assess their phonemic awareness.⁸

Task	Pupils can...	Example
Phoneme isolation	Recognise alliteration	Correctly identifies that 'cat' and 'cot' start with the same phoneme when also given the word 'dig'.
	Recognise when words have the same final phoneme	Correctly identifies that 'top' and 'cap' end with the same phoneme when also given the word 'pig'.
	Isolate the first phoneme in words	Gives the picture of a 'sun' in answer to the question, 'Which picture begins with 's'?'
Blending	Orally blend isolated phonemes together to hear words	Says 'dad' when given 'd-a-d'. Phonemes that make a long sound may be easier to blend at first, e.g. 'mmmooonnnn', than those with a short sound e.g. 'bat'.
	Orally blend longer words with consonant clusters	Says 'clip', 'sift', 'splat', 'sprint', when presented with their isolated phonemes. Words with consonant clusters at the beginning may be initially easier to blend than those with clusters at the end.
Segmentation	Orally segment words into their component phonemes	When given 'sit' can hear and isolate each of the word's phonemes 's-i-t'.
	Orally segment longer words with consonant clusters	When given 'slop' can hear and isolate each of the word's phonemes 's-l-o-p'. Words with consonant clusters at the beginning may be initially easier to segment than those at the end.
Phoneme addition	Manipulate words by adding phonemes in different locations	Adding 'c' to the word 'am' to create 'cam' or adding 't' to the word 'bel' to create 'belt'.
Phoneme deletion	Manipulate phonemes by deleting them from the beginning or end of words	Removing 'c' from 'cup' to get 'up'.
	Manipulate phonemes by deleting phonemes within consonant clusters	Removing 'n' from 'long' to get 'log'.
Phoneme substitution	Substitute an initial phoneme with another to create rhyming strings	Deleting 's' from 'sit' and adding 'p' instead to get 'pit'.
	Substitute a phoneme within a word	Deleting the short 'a' in 'fad' with the long 'a-e' to get 'fade'.

Promising Approaches

A wide range of activities are needed to develop pupils' reading and teachers should learn to develop a rich repertoire that they can use purposefully. Three very promising activities that support early reading are shared reading, systematic phonics and high-quality adult-child interactions. Each of these have very promising evidence of effectiveness, but there can be considerable variation in how each approach is used.

Shared reading

There is very extensive evidence that shared reading can support pupils' learning. However, shared reading involves more than just sitting down with one or more pupils and a book. The quality of the interaction is crucial as it helps to stimulate and guide pupils' thinking and draws their attention to sounds. Although many different frameworks exist, they tend to have some features in common such as teacher modelling and discussion of the text.

The acronym PEER can be used by adults as they read with a child to structure quality discussion and thinking. First, prompt the child to say something about the book. Second, evaluate the pupil's response. Third, extend their response by rephrasing or adding more information. Finally, repeating the prompt can help pupils learn from the expansion.

There are five different types of prompts that can be used and remembered using the acronym CROWD. Completion prompts leave a pause for pupils to complete and words particularly well with rhyming phrases. Recall prompts ask children about an earlier aspect of the plot and can be used to ensure pupils follow the story effectively by drawing attention to key plot details. Open ended prompts Finally, distancing prompts aim to forge connections between children's own life experiences and the book.

High-quality interactions

High-quality, purposeful interactions help to develop pupils' reading, but they are often harder to do well than first appears.⁸ There are many different frameworks designed to support high-quality interactions, including guided interaction and sustained shared thinking which are explored in guidance from the EEF.⁸

The EEF's Early Years Evidence Store identifies four implicit practices to teach and model language:

- > **Imitation** – the adult repeats a phrase after a child has used it modelling how grammar varies.
- > **Commenting** – providing a sentence to articulate an observation.
- > **Recasting** – the adult repeats the phrase the child used but using correct grammar that the child used incorrectly.
- > **Narrating** – providing a rich, extended articulation of an observation that almost provides a running commentary on the child's activity.

Questions for thinking

The Active View of Reading includes verbal reasoning as one of its components. Verbal reasoning includes analysing and evaluating information, including linking together pieces of information. Pupils can be supported to reason more effectively through carefully chosen questions. An review of the development of thinking skills suggested that reasoning can be developed through questions that prompt pupils to focus on five things shown below.⁹ These questions can be incorporated into a broad range of activities, including shared reading.

Crucially, these questions can support pupils to link together different pieces of information within a text to make sense of it. These kinds of questions might also help pupils to develop and use their theory of mind, which involves thinking about characters' mental states, including thoughts, feelings and intentions.

Focus	Question
Evidence	How do we know Winnie-the-Pooh got stuck in the rabbit hole?
Reasons or theory	Why did Winnie-the-Pooh get stuck in the rabbit hole?
Counterfactual suggestion	What would have happened if Winnie-the-Pooh had not eaten the honey?
False belief	What does Winnie-the-Pooh think has happened to stop him getting out?
Future hypothetical suggestion	What could Winnie-the Pooh do next?

Further Reading

There are lots of valuable resources and materials that go into more depth about reading. The following four sources are particularly useful.

- > **The Early Years Evidence Store.** The EEF have developed a suite of free tools and resources to support high quality early years practice. The theme on communication and language is particularly relevant to supporting early reading. The evidence store includes videos and lots of practical guidance.
- > **The Education Endowment Foundation's guidance reports.** A set of guidance reports have been developed based on the best available evidence.
- > **The art and science of teaching primary reading by Chris Such.** Chris is a primary school teacher who has written an essential guide to the science behind reading development, including the practical implications for the classroom. Over 25 bitsized fundamental ideas of reading are explored in an accessible and accurate manner.
- > **The Reading Framework: Teaching the Foundations of Literacy.** This free report from the DfE explores key aspects of teaching reading. The framework include a section on how to support pupils at risk of struggling to learn to read. Guidance is also offered for headteachers and school leaders on how to develop colleagues.
- > **Reading Development and Teaching by Morag Stuart and Rhona Stainthorp.** Professors Stuart and Stainthorp's book is ideal for teachers who have already read the sources above and want to go deeper. The book is very technical in places, but provides a very helpful reference point – especially for helping struggling readers.

References

1. DfE. The reading framework: teaching the foundations of literacy. *Gov.uk*
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-reading-framework-teaching-the-foundations-of-literacy> (2021).
2. EEF. *Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2.*
<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/literacy-ks2> (2021).
3. Foundation, E. E. *Improving Literacy in Key Stage One.* (2016).
4. Duke, N. K. & Cartwright, K. B. The science of reading progresses: Communicating advances beyond the simple view of reading. *Read. Res. Q.* **56**, (2021).
5. Hulme, C., Bowyer-Crane, C., Carroll, J. M., Duff, F. J. & Snowling, M. J. The causal role of phoneme awareness and letter-sound knowledge in learning to read: combining intervention studies with mediation analyses. *Psychol. Sci.* **23**, 572–577 (2012).
6. Castles, A., Rastle, K. & Nation, K. Ending the Reading Wars: Reading Acquisition From Novice to Expert. *Psychol. Sci. Public Interest* **19**, 5–51 (2018).
7. How Now Brown Cow: Phonological Awareness Activities. *Reading Rockets*
<https://www.readingrockets.org/article/how-now-brown-cow-phonological-awareness-activities> (2013).
8. Education Endowment Foundation. *Preparing for Literacy.*
<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/preparing-for-literacy/> (2018).
9. Taggart, G., Ridley, K., Rudd, P. & Benefield, P. Thinking skills in the early years: a literature review. (2005).

