Best Practices in Literacy: Study and Strategies

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Philosophy of Literacy

Communication is the fundamental reason for the existence of language. Thoughts and feelings seek expression to self or others. Language, whether spoken or written, is the vehicle through which expression can occur and by which it can be understood. The relationship between oral and written language is dynamic and reciprocal; the interaction between them changes throughout the developmental period with causality going from spoken to written language and vice versa.

Literacy fuels the fires of knowledge and understanding. Derived from the Latin word for letters, literacy encompasses a range of skills including reading and using written information, as well as writing appropriately in a variety of contexts. People learn literacy skills as the foundation of a lifelong process so that they might develop their knowledge and understanding, achieve personal growth, and learn to participate more effectively in society.

Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening, and critical thinking. Young children use their oral language skills to learn to read, while older children use their reading ability to further their language learning: they read to learn. As educators we strive to inculcate a passion for reading and writing within our students so when they pass from our schools, they will continue to read deeply and widely, and communicate effectively in their writing and speech.

Exemplary teachers who demonstrate expertise in teaching both reading and writing are critical for student literacy success in the classroom. Their lesson preparation must take into consideration research-based findings and an appropriate instructional design for developing the basic concepts needed to produce readers and writers. The instructional components necessary for reading and writing include: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary building, fluency development, comprehension, text structure, and writing process strategies, as well as prerequisite writing skills, such as handwriting, spelling, and grammar.
Introduction to Best Practices

Teachers of literacy must demonstrate expertise in reading and writing. Such a teacher consistently uses a series of best practices, a phrase used to describe solid, reputable, state-of-the-art work. A survey of research points to the following indicators of effective instructional practice:

- motivating students according to their unique needs and interests
- providing direct explicit instruction of reading and writing skills and strategies based on ongoing student assessment
- modeling the effective thinking skills that good readers and writers employ
- devoting 50 percent of the students’ instructional time on a daily basis to reading and writing in the classroom
- activating students’ prior knowledge to help them make connections to what they know and what they would like to learn (e.g. KWL)
- providing opportunities for students to make text and writing connections to their lives, forms of media and the world
- offering both guided and independent reading experiences
- differentiating instruction with a plentiful supply of multi-level books to accommodate interests and ability levels
- motivating readers by offering a choice of books to read that are at their independent reading level, and that they can read with accuracy, fluency and comprehension.
- promoting conversation through purposeful and guided discussion (about a book, piece of writing or topic)
- guiding discussions through open-ended questioning
- creating a more personable learning environment
- designing projects that excite and engage students as opposed to engaging in short disconnected tasks (integration of subjects)
- assessing student work based on common rubrics

In order to help teachers prepare appropriate lessons for their students, an outline of the current research and instructional practices for each literacy component is presented. This outline encompasses current (2007) best practices in the field of literacy instruction. For more in-depth information, references are provided at the end of the document.
Phonemic Awareness

**Definition:** Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify and manipulate the individual sounds, or phonemes, in spoken words. The terms phonemic and phonological awareness are often used interchangeably although they refer to two distinct areas of reading. Phonemic awareness refers to the awareness of individual phonemes; phonological awareness is a more global term that includes the earlier stages of reading, such as rhyme and syllable awareness (*Big Ideas in Beginning Reading*, n.d.; NICHD, 2000).

**Research Base**
- Phonemic awareness can be taught and learned.
- Phonemic awareness is effective in improving reading with all types of children under a variety of teaching conditions.
- Teaching small groups produces better results than teaching individuals.
- Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to spell.
- Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when children are taught to manipulate phonemes by using the letters of the alphabet.
- Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when it focuses on only one or two types of phoneme manipulation, rather than several types.
- Teaching sessions of about 30 minutes and a total of no more than 20 hours appear to be the most effective. However, the National Reading Panel recommends tailoring training time to student learning by individual assessment.

For more information regarding the research base for phonemic awareness, please visit: [http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org](http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org)

**Instructional Design**
Phonemic awareness doesn’t appear to be a discrete state, but rather a sequence of development ranging from simple to complex (Ehri, 1991; Stanovich, 1986). The following sequence of development identified by *Big Ideas in Beginning Reading* (n.d.) should be considered when designing an instructional program to include phonemic awareness:

- Recognition that sentences are made up of words.
- Recognition that words can rhyme.
- Recognition that words can be broken down into syllables.
- Recognition that words can be broken down into onsets and rhymes.
- Recognition that words can begin with the same sound.
- Recognition that words can end with the same sound.
- Recognition that words can have the same medial sound(s).
- Recognition that words can be broken down into individual phonemes.
- Recognition that sounds can be deleted from words to make new words.
- Ability to blend sounds to make words.
- Ability to segment words into constituent sounds.

For additional considerations in instructional design, please visit: [http://reading.uoregon.edu/curricula/models.php](http://reading.uoregon.edu/curricula/models.php)
**Instructional Strategies**

- Teach systematically and explicitly.
- Focus on just a few types of skills.
- Remember that blending and segmentation are the two most critical skills required for phonemic awareness.
- Teach to small groups rather than individuals or entire classes.
- Add the manipulation of letters to the phonemic awareness tasks.

*(Big Ideas in Beginning Reading, n.d.)*

The following are examples of skill activities for phonemic awareness instruction identified by the National Reading Panel (see NICHD, 2000):

- Phoneme isolation (e.g., What is the first or last sound in *sat*?);
- Phoneme identity (e.g., Which sound is the same in *man*, *mitt*, and *mess*?);
- Phoneme categorization (e.g., Which word doesn't belong? *fat*, *fan*, *tap*);
- Phoneme blending (e.g., What word results when you blend these separately pronounced individual sounds together to make a word? /p/ /i/ /t/);
- Phoneme segmentation (e.g., What are the separate sounds in this word? Show me by tapping or counting each sound as you pronounce the word, or set out a token as you say each sound - *ant* - /a/ /n/ /t/ - 3 sounds).

**Assessment**

- Select and administer assessment tools that are valid and reliable in the measurement of phonemic awareness.
- Administer assessments one-on-one.
- Select assessments that measure the following:
  - Phoneme matching: the ability to identify words that begin with the same sound.
  - Phoneme isolation: the ability to isolate a single sound from within a word.
  - Phoneme blending: the ability to blend individual sounds into a word.
  - Phoneme segmentation: the ability to break a word into individual sounds.
  - Phoneme manipulation: the ability to modify, change, or move the individual sounds in a word.

*(Big Ideas in Beginning Reading, n.d.)*

- Monitor students identified as being at risk of reading difficulty once or twice per month to ensure effectiveness of intervention and to allow timely instructional changes.
- Use assessments for screening, diagnosing reading problems and monitoring progress.
- Administer alternative assessments, as appropriate, for students with disabilities.

Note: Do not assume students know the letters and sounds of the alphabet regardless of grade, age or ability level.

For more information regarding assessments, please see:

- [http://idea.uoregon.edu/assessment/analysis_results/test_se_results.html](http://idea.uoregon.edu/assessment/analysis_results/test_se_results.html)
- [http://reading.uoregon.edu/au/au_assess.php](http://reading.uoregon.edu/au/au_assess.php)
Phonics Instruction

Definition: Phonics instruction is a way of teaching reading that stresses the acquisition of letter-sound correspondences and their use in reading and spelling. Other terms often used interchangeably with phonics are decoding and phonological recoding. Because the English language is alphabetic, decoding is an essential and primary means of recognizing words. There are simply too many words in the English language to rely on memorization as a primary word identification strategy (NICHD, 2000).

Research Base
- Meta-analysis of the research indicates that explicit, systematic phonics instruction (letter-sound relationships taught directly in a well-defined sequence) is significantly more effective than nonsystematic or no phonics instruction with children of different ages, abilities and socio-economic status backgrounds.
- The research indicates the ability to read and spell words is enhanced in kindergartners who receive systematic beginning phonics instruction.
- Researchers report first graders who are taught phonics systematically are better decoders and spellers and show significant improvement in their ability to comprehend text.
- Research with older children who received systematic phonics instruction revealed while they were better able to decode, spell and read text orally, their comprehension was not significantly improved.
- The research reveals systematic synthetic phonics (linking individual letter or letter combinations with appropriate sounds and blending the sounds to form words) instruction had a positive and significant effect on disabled learners’ reading skills. The results of various studies indicated this population improved substantially in their ability to read words and showed significant, albeit small, gains in their ability to process text.

For more information regarding the research base for phonics instruction visit: http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org

Instructional Design
- The primary focus of phonics instruction is to help beginning readers understand how letters are linked to sounds (phonemes) to form letter-sound correspondences and spelling patterns and to help them learn how to apply this knowledge in their reading.
- Phonics instruction is an essential part of a total reading program, but should be integrated with instruction in phonemic awareness, fluency and comprehension.
- The hallmark of a systematic phonics approach is that a sequence of phonics elements is delineated. Below is a list of phonics instructional methods identified by Big Ideas in Beginning Reading (n.d.):
  - **Systematic phonics**: Letter-sound relationships are taught directly in a clearly defined sequence.
  - **Systematic synthetic phonics**: Students are taught directly to link an individual letter or letter combination with its appropriate sound and then blend the sounds to form words.
- **Analytic phonics**: Students are first taught whole word units followed by systematic instruction linking the specific letters in the word with their respective sounds.
- **Embedded phonics**: Students are taught phonics skills by embedding phonics instruction in text reading. This is a more implicit approach that relies to some extent on incidental learning. Note that the research base reflects that direct “explicit” instruction has been proven to be more effective than “implicit” instruction.
- **Phonics through spelling**: Students are taught to segment words into phonemes and to select letters for those phonemes (i.e., teaching students to spell words phonemically).

**Instructional Strategies**

- Teach systematically and explicitly starting with sound/symbol relationships (if not mastered).
  For video clip of letter/sound correspondences visit: [http://reading.uoregon.edu/au/au_skills_lsc_vidk1.php](http://reading.uoregon.edu/au/au_skills_lsc_vidk1.php)
- Model/demonstrate how to blend letter-sounds to pronounce known words, and how to segment sounds in known words to write letters representing these sounds.
- Teach each step of instruction using consistent and brief wording.
- Separate auditorially and visually similar letters.
- Introduce some continuous sounds early.
- Introduce letters that can be used to build many words.
- Introduce lowercase letters first unless uppercase letters are similar in configuration.
- Teach simple skills before teaching complex skills.
  - Once students can identify the sound of the letter on two successive trials, include the new letter-sound correspondence with other (six to eight) letter sounds.
  - When students can identify four to six letter-sound correspondences in two seconds each, include these letters in single-syllable, CVC, decodable words.
- Correct errors immediately.
- Teach each skill to mastery before continuing to the next skill.
- Provide ample opportunities for practice. Adequate time for practice will be determined by individual skill level.

For more information regarding instructional design considerations and instructional strategies visit: [http://reading.uoregon.edu/au/au_skills_lsc.php](http://reading.uoregon.edu/au/au_skills_lsc.php)

**Assessment**

- Select and administer assessment tools that are valid and reliable in the measurement of phonics/decoding skills.

For more information on assessment tools visit: [http://reading.uoregon.edu/assessment/index.php](http://reading.uoregon.edu/assessment/index.php)
Vocabulary

Definition: Vocabulary development is the understanding of specific words presented in text or oral language. Vocabulary is an important prerequisite for developing reading comprehension and oral and written expression. Students who do not have a strong vocabulary continue to struggle to gain meaning from text while reading, and struggle to understand new concepts presented in oral discussions. Vocabulary is an essential skill for learning to read and write, and vocabulary strategies are necessary when students are “reading to learn.”

Researchers often refer to four types of vocabulary:

- **Receptive Vocabulary**
  1) **Listening vocabulary**: the words we need to know to understand what we hear or listen to
  2) **Reading vocabulary**: the words we need to know to understand what is presented to us in text

- **Productive or Expressive Vocabulary**
  3) **Speaking vocabulary**: the words we use in speaking
  4) **Writing vocabulary**: the words we use when writing

Vocabulary is the ability to understand (receptive) and use (expressive) words to acquire and convey meaning:

Learning, as a language based activity, is fundamentally and profoundly dependent on vocabulary knowledge. Learners must have access to the meanings of words that teachers, or their surrogates (e.g., other adults, books, films, etc.), use to guide them into contemplating known concepts in novel ways (i.e., to learn something new) (Baker, Simmons, & Kame’enui, 1997).

**Research Base**

- Children learn the meanings of most words indirectly. They do so by engaging daily in oral language, listening to adults read to them, and reading extensively on their own (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborne, 2001).
- Although a great deal of vocabulary is learned indirectly, some vocabulary should be taught directly (NICHD, 2000).
- Repetition and multiple exposures to words contribute to students’ understanding of word meaning (NICHD, 2000).
- Even weak readers’ vocabulary knowledge is strongly correlated to the amount of reading they engage in: “Research has shown that children who read even ten minutes a day outside of school experience substantially higher rates of vocabulary growth between second and fifth grade than children who do little or no reading” (Anderson & Nagy, 1992).
- Words are typically learned from repeated encounters (often 8-10 exposures), rather than from a single context or encounter (McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985).
- Children who enter with limited vocabulary knowledge grow much more discrepant over time from their peers who have rich vocabulary knowledge (Baker et al., 1997).
Instructional Design

The NRP has been reticent to suggest any one method of learning vocabulary because there are rarely more than a handful of studies on any one method. An analysis of the research suggests that a variety of direct and indirect methods of vocabulary instruction can be effective. Relying on any single method is not advised because findings indicate a variety of methods may be differentially effective. However, some fairly consistent trends in the research do point toward the following implications for practice:

- Vocabulary instruction should be incorporated into reading instruction (NICHD, 2000).
- Vocabulary items that are required for a specific text should be taught directly—this helps both vocabulary learning and reading comprehension (NICHD, 2000).
- The more connections that can be made to a specific word, the better it is learned (NICHD, 2000).
- Pre-instruction of vocabulary in reading lessons has been shown to have a significant effect on learning outcomes (NICHD, 2000).
- Students should be given strategies to use when they encounter new words in oral and written language (NICHD, 2000).
- The context in which words are learned is very important. Vocabulary words should be words the learner will encounter in many contexts because students learn new words better when they encounter them often (Armbruster et al., 2001).
- A large portion of vocabulary items should be derived from content learning materials (NICHD, 2000).
- Teachers should include both context and definitions for words (Stahl, 1986).
- Children learn words best when they are provided with instruction over an extended period of time and when that instruction has them work actively with the words (Armbruster et al., 2001).

Instructional Strategies

- Students learn new vocabulary from oral language experiences such as listening to adults read to them. Teachers should read aloud to students, no matter what grade they teach:
  - Reading aloud works best when the teacher discusses the selection before, during and after reading. This discussion should include new vocabulary and concepts which will help them to connect the words to their prior knowledge and experiences.
- Teachers need to help students develop word-learning strategies they can use with new words that have not been taught directly:
  - These strategies include how to use dictionaries and other reference aids to learn word meanings; how to use information about word parts to figure out the meanings of words in text; and how to use context clues to determine word meanings.
- Teachers should provide many opportunities for students to read in and out of school. The more students read on their own, the more words they will encounter and the more word meanings they will become familiar with.
Because it is not possible to directly teach students all the words in a text that they are not familiar with, teachers should focus on teaching three types of words:

- Important words that are critical for understanding a concept or the text
- Useful words students are likely to see and use again.
- Difficult words- Direct instruction should be provided for words that are particularly difficult for students (e.g., words with multiple meanings, idiomatic expressions) (Armbruster et al., 2001).

Students learn vocabulary more effectively when they are actively and directly involved in constructing meaning rather than in memorizing definitions or synonyms (Baker et al., 1997).

When implementing direct vocabulary instruction, teachers should be sure students are aware of what the task is and how to complete it. Students should know why they are doing the task and the components of vocabulary learning, as opposed to solely focusing on the words to be learned (NICHD, 2000).

For more information on teaching vocabulary, please see the following links:

- From the Institute for the Development of Educational Achievement at the University of Oregon:
  - [http://reading.uoregon.edu/voc/voc_types.php](http://reading.uoregon.edu/voc/voc_types.php)
  - [http://reading.uoregon.edu/voc/voc_sequence.php](http://reading.uoregon.edu/voc/voc_sequence.php)

For more information on instructional strategies for vocabulary see Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002).

**Assessment**

According to the research done by the National Reading Panel (see NICHD, 2000):

- There is no single standard for assessing vocabulary. However, they also recommend more instructional research be done in this area.
- Using more than one measure of vocabulary is critical for sound instruction and evaluation, due to the fact there is more than one type of vocabulary and each type is measured differently.
- Standardized tests can provide a global measure of vocabulary and may be used to provide a baseline.
- Few researchers have depended on standardized instruments to assess the efficacy of the instruction they studied, thus suggesting that the more closely the assessment matches the instruction, the more appropriate the conclusions about instructional effectiveness will be.

Note: Accommodations should be administered, as appropriate, for students with disabilities (Quenemoen, Thompson, Thurlow, & Lehr, 2001).
Fluency

Definition: Fluency is the ability to read text automatically, accurately, and effortlessly. It is reading words quickly without conscious attention and effort. Fluency is a critical skill that links word recognition and comprehension. It is situational and can be influenced by readability, topic, and background knowledge. Fluency can also be influenced by sight word efficiency, phonemic decoding efficiency, vocabulary size, and general naming speed.

Research Base

- Fluency can be taught and learned (Armbruster et al., 2001).
- Through repetition and progress monitoring of oral reading skills, student fluency can increase (Faulkner & Levy, 1999).
- Researchers have found guided reading and rereading of text until a certain level of fluency is reached to be effective (NICHD, 2000).
- Independent silent reading is an effective instructional approach to increase fluency (NICHD, 2000).
- Fluency instruction should be explicit and systematic (Armbruster et al., 2001).
- Practicing oral reading through the use of audiotapes, tutors, and peer guidance is beneficial for increasing fluency (Gilbert, Williams, & McLaughlin, 1996).
- Developing fluency skills increases comprehension skills (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1993).
- Because accuracy alone does not lead to strong comprehension skills, students must become fluent readers (Armbruster et al., 2001).

Note: Do not assume students are fluent readers regardless of age, grade or ability level.

For more information regarding the research base for fluency, visit: [http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/explore/fluency.html](http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/explore/fluency.html).

Instructional Design

Students should develop fluency in three critical areas: letter-sound fluency, irregular word fluency, and oral reading fluency.

For an example of each, please visit: [http://reading.uoregon.edu/flu/flu_skills.php](http://reading.uoregon.edu/flu/flu_skills.php).

Instruction in these three areas should be explicit and systematic (NICHD, 2000).

**Students with strong fluency skills are able to:**

- identify letter-sound correspondences automatically and accurately
- identify familiar spelling patterns quickly
- identify isolated words and connected text effortlessly (NICHD, 2000)
Teachers who strive to increase fluency should:

- select appropriate instructional tasks
- schedule sufficient time for practice
- set student fluency goals (Armbruster et al., 2001)

For additional considerations on the instructional design for teaching fluency, please visit: http://reading.uoregon.edu/flu/index.php.

Instructional Strategies

- Instruction should be explicit and systematic to increase fluency (Armbruster et al., 2001).
- Give students opportunities to reread passages out loud (Armbruster et al., 2001).
- Provide feedback on student fluency skills (Armbruster et al., 2001).
- Ensure passages are within the learner's decoding range, 95% accuracy or higher, (O'Neill, Harbor, & Parton, 2004).
- Provide daily opportunity for fluency building (Armbruster et al., 2001).
- Allow students to listen to books on tape (Gilbert et al., 1996).
- Identify target reading rates (Armbruster et al., 2001).
- To determine an appropriate text level, have a student read a passage from the text. Calculate the number of words read correctly and divide by the total words read. This will give you the student's accuracy level (Mather, 2001).

  - Higher than 97% accuracy = independent reading level.
  - 94-97% accuracy = instructional level (when working on fluency, materials should be at this level or above).
  - 93% or below = frustration level

For more information regarding instructional strategies for teaching fluency, visit:

http://www.readingrockets.org/article.php?ID=99 and

http://www.ldonline.org/article.php?max=20&id=552&loc=27

Assessment

- Select and administer valid and reliable assessment tools to monitor student progress with fluency skills (Good & Kaminski, 2002).
- Monitor student progress regularly to ensure student achievement in fluency is progressing (Good & Kaminski, 2002).
- Administer assessments one-on-one (Good & Kaminski, 2002).

For additional information regarding assessments for fluency, visit:

Comprehension Strategies and Instruction

Definition: Comprehension is the complex cognitive process involving the intentional interaction between reader and text to extract meaning. Reading comprehension is essential not only to academic learning in all subject areas but to lifelong learning as well. To be able to construct meaning from text, a child must have general language comprehension skills and the ability to accurately and fluently identify words in print. (Torgeson, 2002)

Research Base:
- Comprehension cannot be understood without a clear understanding of the role vocabulary development and vocabulary instruction play in the process (NICHD, 2000).
- A critical problem for most children who experience reading difficulties involves early and continued problems acquiring accurate and fluent word identification skills (Torgeson, 2002).
- Comprehension can be improved by teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies, or to reason strategically when they encounter barriers to understanding what they are reading. (NICHD, 2000).
- Text comprehension instruction is most effective when teachers use a combination of reading comprehension techniques (NICHD, 2000).

Instructional Strategies:
- **Metacognition** - Readers need to monitor their own thinking while reading. Ultimately they should be able to clearly articulate their thinking orally and in writing
- **Monitoring for Meaning** - Readers need an awareness of when comprehension breaks down and will use the following fix-up strategies:
  - Track their thinking through coding, writing, or discussion
  - Notice when they lose focus
  - Stop and go back to clarify thinking
  - Reread to enhance understanding
  - Read ahead to clarify meaning
  - Identify and articulate what is confusing or puzzling about the text
  - Recognize that all of their questions have value
  - Develop the disposition to question the text or author
  - Think critically about the text
  - Be willing to disagree with its information or logic
  - Match the problem with the strategy that will best solve it
- **Schema-connections, text structure, schema for author or genre**
  - Readers use schema (prior knowledge) purposefully to understand more thoroughly what they read. Prior knowledge includes information and experiences that contribute to and enhance what a reader or writer knows.
  - Readers understand the structure of a text in order to analyze how stories are organized and gain greater meaning.
- **Questioning**
  - Readers purposefully generate questions before, during and after reading to comprehend more completely what they are reading.
• Inferring
  ➢ Readers infer by using both background knowledge and information learned from the text to draw conclusions, interpret, form opinions, and predict.

• Determining Importance
  ➢ Readers decide on the important elements and themes in text content at the word, sentence, and whole-text level.

• Synthesizing
  ➢ Readers monitor overall meaning, important concepts and themes in text as they read, understanding their thinking evolves in the process.

• Sensory Images
  ➢ Readers create detailed images that contribute to comprehension. They can use these images to draw conclusions, make inferences, fill in missing information, and recall important details.

Instructional Design
Teaching students to read strategically means we show them how to construct meaning when they read. Comprehension strategy instruction is most effective when teachers:

• Model their own use of the strategy repeatedly over time
• Show students their thinking when reading, and articulate how that thinking helps them better understand what they read
• Discuss how the strategy helps readers make meaning
• Make connections between the new strategy and what the reader already knows
• Respond in writing by coding the text according to a particular strategy
• Gradually release responsibility for the use of the strategy to the students
• Build in large amounts of time for actual text reading by the students
• Provide opportunities for guided practice in strategy application
• Show students how the strategy applies to other texts, genres, formats, disciplines, and contexts
• Help students notice how these strategies intersect and work in conjunction with one another
• Take time to observe and confer directly with students about their strategy learning, and keep records of those observations and conferences
• Remind students that the purpose for using the strategy is to better comprehend text

Instructional Methods/Strategies:
• Comprehension Monitoring
• Cooperative Learning
• Graphic Organizers
• Story Structure
• Question Answering
• Question Generating
• Summarizing- includes determining importance and synthesis
• Think aloud
• Constructing Images
• Predicting-prior knowledge activating
• Clarifying
• Visual Representation
Gradual Release of Responsibility
1. Explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used.
2. Teacher and/or student modeling of the strategy in action
3. Collaborative use of the strategy in action
4. Guided practice using strategy with gradual release of responsibility
5. Independent use of strategies

ASSESSMENT:
Reading comprehension can be measured using a variety of tools, such as:
- Informal reading inventories
- Curriculum-based measures
- Major Point Interview for Readers (MPIR) found in:
  Keene, Ellin. "The Major Point Interview for Readers." KEY POINTS
The Process of Writing

Definition: Teachers and students, authors and writers, may incorporate many stages into the writing process depending on the purposes for writing, but five basic stages are present in some form: planning or pre-planning, drafting, revision, editing and publication.

Research Base:

- The most effective literacy instruction integrates reading and writing.
- Writing is the process of making thinking visible.
- Writing is a process of constructing meaning through language and expression.
- Writing must be fluent and automatic.
- Writing must be strategic.
- Writing requires motivation.

http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/curriculum/english/writing.shtm

Instructional Design/Instructional Strategies:

Students need a classroom context of shared learning. Building a supportive context for working collaboratively is perhaps the most important step a teacher can take to promote writing growth (Nancy Steineke’s Reading and Writing Together: Collaborative Literacy in Action, 2002, provides excellent strategies for this). Listening to each other’s compositions, students discover what makes writing strong by examining their own reactions.

Effective writing programs involve the complete writing process. Many children never see skillful writers at work and are unaware that writing is a staged, craft-like process that competent authors typically break into manageable steps. Teachers must help children enact and internalize such steps as the following:

- selecting or becoming involved in a topic, finding a purpose for writing, and clarifying the audience
- prewriting – considering an approach, gathering thoughts or information, mapping plans, free-writing ideas
- drafting – organizing material and getting words down
- revising – further developing ideas and clarifying their expression
- editing – polishing meaning and proofreading for publication

Teachers can help children recognize that the process varies between individuals and between writing tasks. However, just as with other crafts, not all pieces are worth carrying through all stages, and children can learn by focusing on just one or two stages for a given piece of writing. If they revise and edit just their best pieces, the work will be meaningful and likely to reflect real effort.

Skillful teachers conduct many kinds of prewriting activities:

- memory searches
- listening, charting, webbing, and clustering of raw ideas
- drawing and sketching
- group brainstorming
- free-writing (a specific process for free probing of thoughts)
• discussion in pairs, small groups, and the whole class

**Teachers help students draft and revise. Skillful teachers can explore various revision processes with students:**
• reviewing one’s work and comparing the written word to the intended meaning
• considering the reader’s perspective and/or background knowledge about the topic
• becoming aware of styles and strategies by examining examples from other writers
• generating multiple options for expressing an idea and choosing the one that works best

**Teachers must help students learn the craft of writing.** Children absorb a great deal about language through listening, talking, and reading; however, most to focus their awareness on particular strategies for expressing ideas.

**Strategies for expressing ideas:**
• finding ways to begin and end
• developing options for organizing a piece
• identifying vivid details that bring ideas to life
• composing sentences clearly and with standard English conventions.

The craft of writing is most effectively taught through brief mini-lessons focused on skills appropriate to particular writing tasks students are tackling, so the skills can be practiced immediately in meaningful settings.

**Effective teaching strategies for mini-lessons include:**
• modeling by the teacher on an overhead or LCD projector
• having students compare various ways of expressing an idea
• noticing good strategies students are using
• brainstorming a solution to a particular problem in a sample piece (whole group or individually)
• following up with one-on-one conferences

**Grammar and mechanics are best learned in the context of actual writing.** Research has shown that isolated skill-and-drill grammar lessons do not transfer to writing performance.

**Writing Next: A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York by Steve Graham and Delores Perin suggested the following effective strategies to improve the writing of Grades 4-12:**
• **Writing Strategies**-Teaching strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions has shown a dramatic effect on the quality of student writing.
• **Summarization**- Teaching students to summarize text has a consistent and strong impact on their ability to write good summaries.
• **Collaborative Writing**-Having students work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their work has a positive impact on improving the quality of student writing.
- **Specific Product Goals** - Setting specific product goals involves assigning students specific, reachable goals for the writing they complete.
- **Word Processing** - Using word processing equipment can be particularly helpful for low-achieving students.
- **Sentence Combining** - Teaching students to combine two or more basic sentences into a more complex sentence enhances the quality of their writing.
- **Pre-Writing** - Engaging the students in pre-writing activities, which help them generate or organize ideas for their compositions, enhances the quality of their first drafts.
- **Inquiry Activities** - Engaging the students in activities helps them to develop ideas and content for a particular writing task by analyzing data (comparing and contrasting cases or collecting and evaluating evidence).
- **Process Writing Approach** See above.
- **Study of Models** - Examining well crafted texts provides students with models text structures and literary elements.
- **Writing for Content Area Learning** – Writing across the curriculum is essential.

**Assessment:**
Research indicates that writers grow more by praise than by criticism. Strategies for evaluation include:
- focusing on one or two kinds of errors at a time
- brief oral conferences at various stages of the work
- peer and teacher feedback
- portfolios or folder systems for evaluating cumulatively
- student involvement in goal setting, evaluation, and written reflection
- knowledge of grading criteria should be known by the student (rubric, checklist)
Spelling

**Definition:** Spelling is the knowledge of orthography, the correct sequences of letters in the writing system. It is not merely the memorization of correct spellings, but a more complex acquisition of many aspects of word knowledge gained over time.

**Research Base:**
- The acquisition of spelling skills follows a developmental sequence
- English orthography is alphabetic because it represents the relationship between letters and sounds.
- Automaticity (speed and accuracy) in recognizing spelling patterns leads to the fluency necessary for proficient reading and writing.

**Instructional Design/Instructional Strategies:**
- Link instruction to the texts being read
- Provide a systematic scope and sequence of word-level skills
- Provide multiple opportunities for hands-on practice and application
- Provide daily instruction through active exploration to teach students the regularities, patterns and conventions of English orthography needed to read and spell
- Understand the developmental aspects of word knowledge
- Differentiate instruction based upon student needs
- Select skills to teach based upon what the children “use but confuse” (i.e. select skills based upon a student's “zone of proximal development”)
- Use words students can read
- Compare words that have a targeted pattern with words that do not
- Sort words by how they sound as well as how they are spelled
- Use word sorts to help students organize what they know about words and to form generalizations that they can then apply to new words they encounter in their reading
- Avoid rules
- Encourage invented spelling so that students will focus on expressing their ideas so they will use rich vocabulary rather than more basic words they can spell
- There should be an emphasis on the interrelatedness of spelling and phonics, morphology, and vocabulary as students move farther along in development

**Assessment for Spelling (Guidelines):**
- Work from a developmental model (start with what students can do and track over time)
- Use informal assessments while teaching
- Do not assess students at their frustration levels

Handwriting

**Definition:** Handwriting is a complex skill that needs to be taught directly. Explicit and systematic instruction in how to form and fluently write the letters of the alphabet has been shown to improve both handwriting and compositional skills. Learning how to write letters and spell words appears to reinforce letter naming, phonemic and word reading skills.

**Research Base:** Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of a structured handwriting program. Significant improvement has been demonstrated in the legibility and accuracy of handwriting.

**Instructional Design/Instructional Strategies:**

Effective teachers integrate handwriting into meaningful and multisensory activities for strong memory connections and motivation. Effective instructional practices include:

- teaching correct pencil grip
- teaching and reinforcing correct seating and positioning
- attaching a verbal label to letter formation.
- using a developmental approach (grouping the letters by difficulty and teaching a handwriting style that uses simple, vertical lines)
- integrating instruction with literacy activities
- providing daily, supervised practice (ten minutes of direct instruction and five minutes of practice)
- individualizing instruction based upon learner needs

**Assessment:** Grade level expectations should be developed in collaboration with the Occupational Therapist. Handwriting can then be informally assessed through writing samples and observation.

The following published standardized assessments are available:

- The Minnesota Handwriting Assessment (Harcourt Assessment, Inc.)
- Evaluation Tool of Children’s Handwriting (Pocket Full of Therapy, Inc.)
References for Phonemic Awareness


References for Phonics Instruction


References for Vocabulary


**References for Fluency**


### References for Comprehension


### References for Writing


References for Spelling


References for Handwriting