

Special Issues in Third Grade

The third grade is a year of significant growth, development, and consequence. By the end of third grade, students are making the transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Third-grade teachers are entrusted with the task of making sure students leave their classrooms prepared to comprehend, analyze, and critique increasingly complex and varied texts. Moreover, for many states, third grade is the first time students participate in state assessments, and some states even require proficiency on third-grade state assessments as a requirement for promotion to fourth grade.

Research tells us that children who struggle with reading skills during the first 3 years of schooling rarely acquire average levels of reading fluency (Torgesen, Rashotte, & Alexander, 2001) and must also work hard to develop comprehension strategies (Brown, Palincsar, & Purcell, 1986) and sufficient vocabulary (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). These students also have lower motivation to read and exhibit poor attitudes about reading (Oka & Paris, 1986). Third-grade teachers are responsible for eliminating deficits students may have and ensuring that students acquire the necessary skills to be successful in subsequent school years.

The articles in this issue will help Reading First teachers, coaches, and administrators meet these challenges. Here we will discuss topics such as third-grade fluency assessment, comprehension instruction, incidental word learning, and flexible grouping.

Although this edition's focus is on third-grade issues, kindergarten through second-grade teachers can also benefit from an awareness of matters that affect third-grade teachers. This awareness may help those teachers address concerns and prevent problems that may arise later.

This edition of the *Reading First Notebook* is the third and final edition that deals with grade-level specific information. Kindergarten issues were addressed in the Winter 2006 edition, and first- and second-grade issues were the focus of the Spring 2006 issue.

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Reading First Levels of Participation As of 6/22/06

1,600 district awards representing
5,283 schools have been made.



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Preventing the Fourth-Grade Slump

Some students, especially socioeconomically disadvantaged students, may read adequately from kindergarten through third grade but suddenly begin to struggle when they reach fourth grade. This phenomenon has been referred to as the “fourth-grade slump.”

Jeanne Chall (1983) identified two major stages of reading development. The first stage is characterized as a period where children are “learning to read” and the second stage as a period where children are “reading to learn.” The first stage typically encompasses grades 1, 2, and 3, and the second stage encompasses grades 4 and beyond. “Learning to read” is a time when students are decoding words contained in simple texts that use familiar language. In fourth grade, texts become more complex and abstract and contain language and concepts that are more challenging. Consequently, some students’ reading scores dip. In subsequent grades, as texts become more and more difficult and supply less and less contextual support, students face the “eighth-grade cliff.” Difficulty in text comprehension seems to be compounded by the fact that many upper-elementary grade teachers do not have “substantial knowledge of how to teach reading,” according to Stanford University professor Michael Kamil (Grosso de Leon, 2002, p. 1).

Results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) confirm that there are still a number of students in fourth grade who struggle with reading skills and that the achievement gap persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their counterparts.

Chall (1983) found that vocabulary scores were the first to drop among fourth graders, followed in sixth grade by comprehension scores. She contends that this may indicate that contextual support within the fourth-grade



level text was sufficient to compensate for word-meaning weaknesses in the beginning, but as the text concepts and language became more complex, contextual support was no longer sufficient to sustain comprehension.

So what can Reading First schools do to combat the dreaded fourth-grade slump? Chall and Jacobs (2003) suggest a focus on vocabulary to expand students’ word knowledge along with fluency and automaticity instruction. By honing these skills, students can identify words and their meanings instantly so their cognitive capacity can be used solely for comprehension of connected text. Grosso de Leon (2002) proposes a focus on comprehension instruction that will provide students specific strategies to help them understand complex text. In addition, efforts to build background knowledge help



students understand texts that may contain less familiar and less cohesive material (Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGoldrick, & Kurita, 1989). All of these strategies are very familiar to teachers who have spent time in Reading First classrooms. Reading First teachers also know that this instruction can't wait. Chall and Jacobs (2003) emphasize that students in the early grades who seem proficient in narrative reading comprehension despite having deficits in word meaning and word recognition will likely suffer later. They state, "Because of the developmental nature of reading, the later one waits to strengthen weaknesses, the more difficult it is for the children to cope with the increasing literacy demands in the later grades."

Reading First teachers have a critical responsibility to ensure that their students leave the third grade prepared for the reading demands of the upper-elementary grades. A steady application of explicit instruction in the five skill areas (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) outlined in the National Reading Panel report will help them achieve this goal. District and school leaders of Reading First schools may also consider how teachers in the upper-elementary grades can learn about quality reading instruction. Administrators might consider offering fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade teachers the following:

- Professional development modeled after Reading First—namely, professional development that
 - is aligned with district and state professional development;

- includes training in core and supplemental programs;
- is ongoing and job-embedded; and
- includes follow-up and support.
- A strong curriculum and assessment system, linked directly to the early elementary system, to teach and assess appropriate skills
- A reading coach to support their efforts

The "fourth-grade slump" and the "eighth-grade cliff" can be avoided with a strong foundation of skills that support comprehension and vocabulary development in the primary grades and continued maintenance and development of these abilities throughout a child's school career. Reading First teachers are well prepared to meet this challenge.

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Promoting Incidental Word Learning



We know from the report of the National Reading Panel (2000) that vocabulary is learned through both incidental word learning and intentional word teaching.

Direct instruction in vocabulary skills is familiar to Reading First teachers and is clearly outlined in the scientifically based reading curriculum adopted by every Reading First school. Vocabulary skills for third-grade students may include using a dictionary and reference sources, using context clues, and using synonyms, antonyms, homophones, homographs, figurative language, and morphemic analysis.

Equally important, however, is word learning that is not so intentional. Teachers may be the most important factor in influencing a child's incidental word learning. Because teachers can and should play such an important role in advancing incidental word learning, it is important that they are familiar with ways in which they can promote it.



What are some strategies for promoting incidental word learning? In his book, *The Vocabulary Book: Learning & Instruction*, Michael Graves offers four means by which vocabulary can be learned incidentally: (1) listening, (2) reading, (3) discussing, and (4) writing.

Take This Quick Quiz

- 1) Students learn most vocabulary from intentional, explicit vocabulary instruction.
True _____ **False** _____
- 2) Wide reading of independent-level texts is a good way for students to expand their vocabulary.
True _____ **False** _____
- 3) Oral language experiences alone are not sufficient to ensure adequate vocabulary growth necessary for proficient reading comprehension.
True _____ **False** _____

Listening

A teacher can greatly influence his or her students' vocabulary simply by paying attention to the vocabulary he or she uses in the classroom. Try speaking to a group of third graders about *illegible*, rather than *sloppy*, handwriting, or ask them to work *collaboratively*, rather than *together*. The point is not teaching these words and their meanings but simply exposing students repeatedly to words that might be outside of their established vocabulary. Additionally, read-alouds with discussion, audio books, and story telling are effective practices.

Reading

Promoting wide reading is another powerful method of incidental word learning. Hayes and Ahrens (1988) found that children's books contain about one third more rare words than even adult prime-time television shows. A well-stocked classroom library is critical to supporting students' independent reading both in school and at home. Additionally, children should be enticed to read outside of class time. Teacher guidance during reading and student discussion of texts will also promote vocabulary growth.

While direct instruction of vocabulary is an important element of third-grade Reading First instruction, incidental learning of vocabulary should not be neglected.

Discussing

Talking with others can improve vocabulary. Not just any conversation will do, however. Hayes and Ahrens (1988) found that even college graduates do not use many sophisticated words. To be more effective, conversations should center on academic topics that students know something about and should contain the specialized vocabulary typical of those topics. Third graders should be provided opportunities to discuss the forces of motion during a science lesson using such words as “reciprocal” or to discuss how they will display the numerical data of an experiment they have conducted using words like “matrix.”



Writing

As students’ writing skills develop, they begin to focus on the purpose of their writing as well as their audience. As a result, a more focused view of word choice emerges. Students should be encouraged to choose just the right word to convey the meaning they hope to communicate. The process of choosing and using words judiciously will help expand students’ vocabulary.

While direct instruction of vocabulary is an important element of third-grade Reading First instruction, incidental learning of vocabulary should not be neglected. Teachers should arrange to provide incidental word learning opportunities in the areas of listening, reading, discussing, and writing as often as possible.

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Answers to the quiz:

- 1) **False.** Most word learning occurs incidentally through oral language experiences and wide reading (National Reading Panel, 2000).
- 2) **False.** Most researchers agree that students should read a variety of texts from a variety of difficulty levels (Lehr, Osborn, & Hiebert, 2004).
- 3) **True.** Everyday oral language does not contain the varied word use found in written language. Exposure to seldom used or rare words is required to build the vocabulary necessary for proficient reading comprehension (Hayes & Ahrens, 1988).



Using Ongoing Assessment and Flexible Grouping to Optimize Instruction

Danny entered the third grade as an advanced reader. He had long ago mastered basic and advanced decoding and was now devouring chapter books. His oral reading was fluent and he demonstrated good phrasing and intonation, yet his parents were concerned. They thought Danny would eventually encounter problems simply because he did not seem sufficiently challenged at school.

Courtney, on the other hand, was struggling. Despite having participated in tutoring programs, she began the third grade significantly behind her peers in basic reading skills. She now avoided books and dreaded school. Her parents worried that Courtney was so frustrated that she would never be able to benefit from classroom instruction at her grade level.

Danny and Courtney are in the same third-grade class this year. They represent both ends of the spectrum of readers, with a span of about 4.5 grade levels separating their abilities. That is not necessarily unusual in the average classroom, but it does highlight the importance of implementing the in-class, flexible grouping strategies called for by Reading First.

Meta-analyses of research have found small-group instruction to be correlated with increased reading outcomes (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, Moody, & Schumm, 2000; National Reading Panel, 2000). The use



of flexible groups to differentiate instruction has been supported for students of all ability levels, including gifted students (Kingore, 2004) and students with identified learning disabilities (Vaughn, Hughes, Moody, & Elbaum, 2001). By design, the groups are not stagnant throughout the school day or year but are formed and re-formed “in response to the instructional objectives and students’ needs” (Kingore, 2004, p. 49).

According to guidance on Reading First, student placement in and movement among groups should be determined by ongoing assessment (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). This process, therefore, begins with preassessment, using valid and reliable screening tools, to determine students’ various stages of readiness (Hall, 2002).

Once students are in their initial groups and engaged in the appropriate learning activities, a variety of classroom-based instructional assessments should be used to monitor their progress. Informal assessments, including effective questioning, observation, and analyses of student work products, can help teachers plan and adjust instruction based on student needs. However, data from valid and reliable formal progress-monitoring measures should be used to adjust the composition of groups as well as the instructional approach. In this way, information about student learning is continuously gathered and used to ensure optimum instruction for each child’s needs.

Danny and Courtney’s teacher, Ms. Sorola, was planning for the beginning of a unit from the core



instructional program on insects. While she planned whole-group instruction for components such as introducing the elements of nonfiction, text vocabulary, dictionary use, and a review of antonyms, she also planned for small-group instruction. On Tuesday, students would be grouped for paired reading. She decided to pair Danny and Courtney together. She thought that Danny's fluent reading of the first selection—a grade-level nonfiction text—would be an appropriate model for Courtney and that Danny's general reading abilities along with his feedback and encouragement would offer beneficial support for her as they took turns reading portions of the text.

Ms. Sorola knew that some students would need additional support on Wednesday's lesson, which involved specialized vocabulary associated with this unit on insects. Assessment information guided Ms. Sorola to place Courtney and three other students in a group to receive intensive, direct vocabulary instruction. Informal observation during this small-group work, however, led Ms. Sorola to discover Courtney's extensive knowledge of insects. A conversation with Courtney confirmed that she was, in fact, a budding entomologist! Therefore, Ms. Sorola decided immediately to move Courtney to Danny's group, where they and four other students worked on an insect fact



sheet project that incorporated vocabulary related to insects. Ms. Sorola carefully monitored Courtney's progress in this group. Her achievement in this group pleased Ms. Sorola, and Courtney was delighted to share her expertise with her classmates. The initial group of struggling learners continued to participate in a focused activity in which students received scaffolded support to use specific vocabulary words in meaningful sentences.

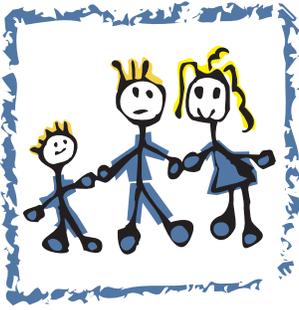


Ms. Sorola used the core reading program's assessments to determine placement in small word-study groups to practice antonyms. Assessment determined that Courtney and four other struggling students would require some extra support in the form of direct explicit instruction as they attempted using and applying antonyms. Meanwhile, Danny and three other advanced third graders would be grouped together to write antonym riddles.

Ongoing assessment in conjunction with flexible grouping strategies can ensure all students are provided instructional experiences that are neither too easy nor too difficult to be valuable. Regardless of where they appear on the spectrum of readers in a typical third-grade class, all students should be enabled to make progress in developing their skills while focusing on the same essential objectives.

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Do Third Graders Still Need Phonics Instruction?

Most students who have consistently participated in Reading First instruction

should be working on advanced phonics and word study by the third grade. But what should be done for students transferring in to a Reading First school who haven't consistently received explicit and systematic phonics instruction or for students who have received good instruction but still don't "get it"?

The National Reading Panel (2000) identified phonics as one of five critical areas of early reading instruction. Phonics instruction includes helping students understand the "code" relationship between letters and sounds and strengthening their ability to use that knowledge to "decode" and read words. Phonics instruction is crucial in helping students recognize familiar words automatically as well as decode words they have never seen before.

According to Torgensen (2000), "To comprehend written material, children need to be able to identify the words used to convey meaning and they must be able to construct meaning once they have identified the individual words in print" (p. 56). Although there may be a variety of causes, if third-grade students have not yet mastered basic phonics, their teachers must take immediate action to ensure that those students have the skills to become proficient comprehenders so they will be prepared to meet the increased reading demands of the fourth grade. In order to do this, teachers should take three steps.

First, the teacher should establish what type of decoding problem the student has. Sometimes a student reads poorly and the teacher assumes it is an accuracy problem when, in fact, it may be a fluency issue.

Simmons and Kame'enui (1998) suggest the following formula to determine whether to focus on accuracy or fluency:

More than one error every 10 words: Work on accuracy



Fewer errors (one in 15–20 words) but a low speed: Work on fluency

Once the teacher or reading coach has determined that a student has difficulty with phonics, he or she should use a diagnostic assessment to determine which phonics skills the student lacks. The assessment may take many forms; it can be a commercially available assessment or the assessment included in the school's core or supplemental reading program. Teachers will get a good understanding of where to begin instruction once this diagnosis has been completed. This instruction will occur during supplemental or intervention instructional time.

The teacher can then select a strategy (many strategies are typically included within core or supplemental instruction programs) to address the identified need. For example, a student who is still struggling to blend the sounds in words can be encouraged to run his or her finger under the word, saying the sounds, and then circle

his or her finger back around the word, blending the sounds together. The student also can practice building words with tiles and blending sounds to read the word as he or she runs a finger underneath the tiles. A student who is struggling with multisyllabic words can be introduced to and consistently encouraged to use a method of chunking large words into smaller parts and decoding those parts. This student might also benefit from breaking off word beginnings and endings (prefixes and suffixes), reading the remaining word, and then adding the prefixes and suffixes back to read the entire word.

Customized instruction, usually provided in a very small group, provides the specialized instruction, focused attention, and immediate teacher feedback that these struggling students need. Instruction should be explicit and systematic to ensure that instruction can begin where assessment indicates it is necessary and no gaps will result. Isolated phonics instruction should be practiced, reinforced, and immediately applied to the reading of a connected text. This can be accomplished through the use of decodable texts that contain the specific types of words the student needs to practice. Learning should be monitored frequently to determine if this concentrated instruction is benefiting the student.

That said, it is equally important for teachers to know that because a third-grade student is struggling with fundamental phonic skills, he or she can still benefit tremendously from exposure to core third-grade instruction that all students receive. It is here that the student will be exposed to the vocabulary and comprehension skills that will be crucial once phonic skills are finally established.

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Dr. Althea Woodruff of the Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts contributed to the content of this article.

Phonics instruction is crucial in helping students recognize familiar words automatically as well as decode words they have never seen before.





A Review of the Analysis of State K–3 Reading Standards and Assessments: Final Report

By Sebastian Wren

As part of the national evaluation of the Reading First Program, the U.S. Department of Education conducted a critical examination of the nation's K–3 reading standards and assessments. This examination was framed around the five critical elements of reading specified in Reading First: (1) comprehension, (2) fluency, (3) vocabulary, (4) phonics, and (5) phonemic awareness. In January 2004, a select panel of experts examined the K–3 reading standards (under adoption at the time of the study) from a random, representative sample of 20 states. They also examined every state's K–3 reading assessments, at least as far as those assessments were described in each state's Reading First application.

The panel's task was to determine to what degree the five critical elements emphasized in Reading First are covered in the state K–3 standards and to what degree those five elements are tested in state K–3 assessments. The results of this analysis has important implications for states as they align standards and assessment practices with the goals of Reading First.

Standards Analysis

The expert panel found numerous gaps and ambiguities in the reading standards related to the five critical elements. Among the five elements, reading comprehension was the best represented in the state standards. In most states examined, standards for reading comprehension were clear, detailed, and grade-appropriate. However, phonics and vocabulary were less clearly described, and phonemic awareness and fluency standards were more often problematic and inconsistent across different states.

Panel members specifically cited a number of problems with K–3 reading standards such as an inappropriate level of detail in the standards' descriptions or a complete omission of certain critical elements in the



state standards (less so for comprehension but more so for the other critical elements). Some standards, especially standards related to phonemic awareness and phonics, were not grade-appropriate. Typically, these standards delineated expectations of second-grade students that should have been mastered in kindergarten or first grade.

Assessment Analysis

The expert analysis of state K–3 reading assessments also revealed inconsistencies and confusions related to the critical elements. Very few states even provide a statewide reading assessment in grades K–2, and only 60% of the states have a statewide reading assessment for third grade.¹ Comprehension and vocabulary are much more commonly tested by these assessments than are phonics, phonemic awareness, or fluency.

Only 21 states use their statewide reading assessment as a Reading First outcome measure. Most states have opted to use other assessments to monitor the impact of Reading First, and of those that do include their state

¹ This study was completed prior to the onset of the No Child Left Behind Act's requirement that all states assess third-grade students beginning with the 2005–2006 school year.

assessment in their evaluation, the state assessment is almost always combined with another assessment that more directly assessed the critical elements.

Implications

This expert panel review was designed to examine the extent to which states are emphasizing the critical elements of reading in grades K–3 as they relate to Reading First and scientifically based reading research. Although all states have initiated Reading First programs, it would seem that the research-based components of Reading First are rarely fully reflected in the standards and expectations for teaching and learning in the states. In other words, state reading standards for grades K–3 and Reading First expectations are typically separate and only tangentially related. Furthermore, this report provides no evidence to suggest that states are endeavoring to revise K–3 reading standards and improve state reading assessment practices to more clearly emphasize learning expectations in the five critical elements of learning to read.

However, one of the reading experts consulted for this report, Michael McKenna (formerly a professor at the University of Georgia and now with the University of Virginia), believes that many states are in fact in the process of incorporating solid research-based information into their K–3 reading standards. “The research for this report was done quite some time ago,” says McKenna. “Certainly some states have already begun changing their standards to reflect research in reading. I know Georgia, for example, did make a deliberate attempt to transform their standards subsequent to the analysis used in this report.”

McKenna is more familiar with Georgia but says that other states are probably going through a similar transformation, reexamining their standards and assessment practices and including more detailed and explicit language based on solid, replicated reading research findings.

This sentiment is echoed by Faith Stevens, who, until recently, was the Reading First director for the state of Michigan. Stevens points out that Michigan has recently implemented a third-grade reading assessment and has been reexamining state reading standards for the early grades. She does suggest, however, that states would be more likely to properly implement these changes if



they had more specific guidance and examples of well-aligned standards and assessments.

Stevens also refers to the realities of state-department organization, pointing out that the Reading First director may not have much power or influence over state reading standards or assessment practices. She says that there is so much work to do, and staff are so consumed with implementing the requirements of Reading First, that there may be little time to coordinate with other departments that might have more direct authority over statewide standards and assessment practices.

Resources such as the three Reading First technical assistance centers, may be able to provide guidance regarding research-based information about the critical components of learning to read that states can use as they further develop their state standards and assessment practices.

The full report of the expert panel can be downloaded at <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/other/reading/state-k3-reading.html> or http://www.readingfirstsupport.us/docs/Final_Report.pdf.

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Sebastian Wren is an independent consultant working to improve reading achievement.

Using Graphic Organizers to Teach Reading Comprehension

The use of graphic organizers supports students in their efforts to understand complex texts.

Although reading comprehension is a consuming, continuous, and complex activity, it is one that, for good readers, is both satisfying and productive (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Readers are asked to employ many strategies simultaneously (determining word meanings, integrating prior knowledge, predicting, inferring, and monitoring understanding) as they read and comprehend text. Additionally, there are many important skills that underlie the ability to comprehend competently: phonemic awareness, decoding and word recognition, fluent reading, and vocabulary usage, along with the ability to access prior knowledge, utilize knowledge of print concepts, and be actively engaged in reading and learning. Because comprehension requires synchronized orchestration of many skills and strategies, reading comprehension can be very difficult to teach, especially in the primary grades. However, it is vitally important that we do.

Comprehension instruction need not impede decoding and word recognition development and in fact probably works synergistically with it (Duke, 2006). Teachers should emphasize text comprehension from the beginning rather than waiting until students have mastered “the basics” of reading (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). Third-grade teachers in Reading First schools should receive students who have been exposed to extensive comprehension instruction in kindergarten through second grade. They can, therefore, build on and expand those skills. Good comprehension instruction includes explicit instruction in

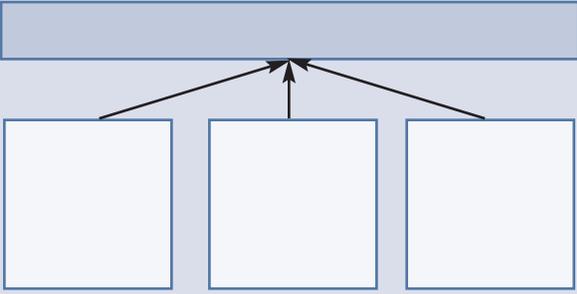
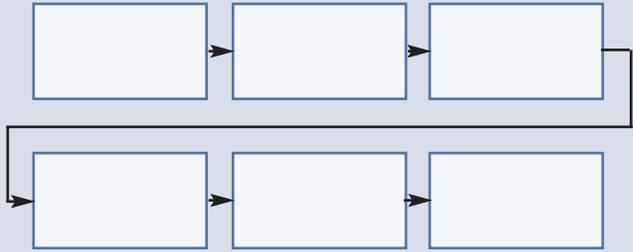
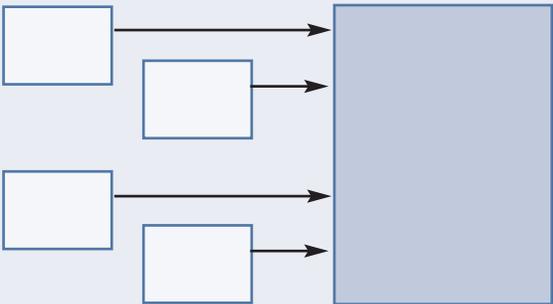
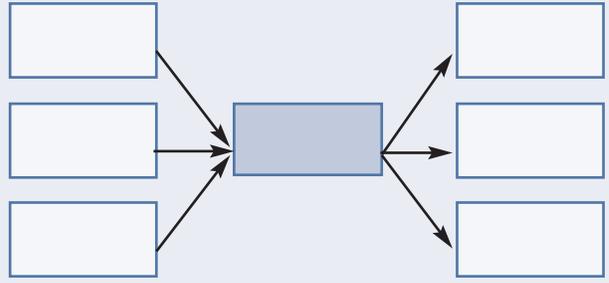
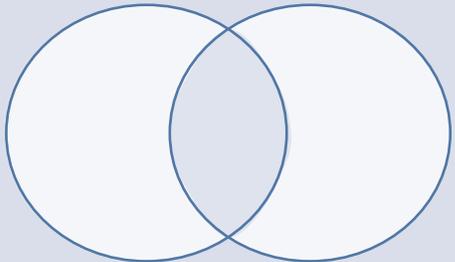
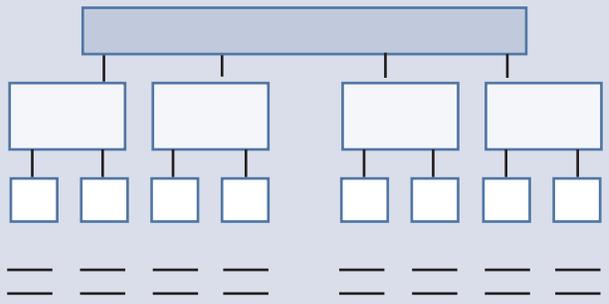


comprehension strategies along with numerous opportunities to read and discuss text. One strategy that is suitable for teaching comprehension skills to third graders is the use of graphic organizers.

Graphic organizers are visual, concrete representations of ideas and concepts. The active process of creating graphic organizers helps students see and remember patterns and relationships.



Examples of Graphic Organizers That Teach and Reinforce Comprehension Skills

<p>Main Idea/Details: Represents the most important point and key facts that support it. For example, the main idea that smoking is bad for your health can be listed along with facts that support the claim.</p> 	<p>Sequence: Represents steps in a procedure or chain of events. For example, students can list a main event in each chapter of a book or the sequenced steps necessary to complete an experiment.</p> 
<p>Drawing Conclusions: Represents facts and knowledge that lead to a conclusion. For example, students can list facts and inferences from the text to demonstrate what might have caused a story character to act in a certain way.</p> 	<p>Cause/Effect: Represents the manner in which events affect one another in a process. For example, students can list factors that lead to smoking and what results from the act of smoking.</p> 
<p>Comparing/Contrasting: Represents similar and different characteristics among people, events, books, etc. For example, students can compare story characters, listing qualities unique to each character within the outer portions of the circles. Character qualities that are shared are entered where the circles intersect.</p> 	<p>Classifying: Represents the arrangement of things into groups based on a rule or characteristic. For example, students can list classes of living things (fish, amphibians, birds, and mammals) with examples of each below.</p> 

Learning and using these organizational tools can ultimately help students gain a more thorough understanding of complex text.

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Addressing the Challenges of Assessing Fluency

By Sebastian Wren

A great deal of emphasis has been placed on reading fluency since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. This much-deserved attention for fluency is long overdue. For over 100 years, fluency has been acknowledged among reading researchers and cognitive scientists as a critical component for students as they learn to read (Breznitz, 2006). Only recently, however, has the substantial body of research on reading fluency started to affect classroom practice. As a result, educators have begun to reexamine their assessment practices, searching for information about their students' fluency. Unfortunately, they don't often find the information they need.

In most schools, fluency is simply not assessed and monitored the way other important components of learning to read are. While educators may have good assessment information about each student's reading comprehension skills, phonics knowledge, or vocabulary knowledge, they rarely have reliable information about fluency. Yet for many students, poor fluency is the bottleneck preventing them from developing proficient comprehension and vocabulary skills.



Reading fluency was defined by the National Reading Panel (2000) as reading with "speed, accuracy, and proper expression." A good test of reading fluency

should encompass these three components. The National Reading Panel did not, however, define those three characteristics clearly, so there has been some debate and confusion on the subject of reading fluency assessment.

Measuring reading speed is fairly straightforward on the surface, but there are some questions to address. For example, what material should the student read? The student's oral reading rate will vary depending on the inherent difficulty of the text, the genre, and the student's familiarity with the subject matter (Moskal & Blachowicz, 2006). Ironically, text difficulty is often determined by monitoring the student's oral reading accuracy—text that students read with 95% accuracy or better is typically deemed to be on the student's reading level.

Given that this is an assessment, however, judgments about text appropriateness can be made differently than they would be for the purpose of reading instruction. Assessment of oral reading fluency should be conducted with short, grade-appropriate passages of text. Therefore, regardless of the student's independent reading level, if the student is in third grade, typical third-grade-level text should be used. A mix of expository and narrative text can be used in the assessment to get an average of the student's oral reading rate across different genres. This will add to the difficulty of administering the assessment, but it provides a more accurate estimate of the student's reading rate.

Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006) recently revised their reading-rate norm tables that educators can use to determine the appropriate reading rates for students in different grades (mid-year first grade through eighth grade). To use these tables, the correct words per minute must be calculated, and that number can be converted to a rough percentile rank (it is unclear what genre of text was used to establish the Hasbrouck and Tindal norms, so it may be prudent to use a mix of narrative and expository text and average



students' scores across genres.) Their revised tables contain norms for the beginning, middle, and end of the school year and are thus very useful for monitoring student growth over time

Measuring accuracy can also be challenging—sometimes it is difficult to determine what should count as a reading error. If a student self-corrects or rearranges words without changing the meaning, should that count against the student? If the student mispronounces a word but is clearly attempting to decode it appropriately, should that count? Typically, self-corrections are seen as a trade-off between time and accuracy. If the student attempts a word, makes a mistake, and corrects that mistake, time is taken away from the student's oral reading rate. Thus, self-corrections should not be counted against the student when assessing accuracy. All other deviations from the text, however, should be marked as an error. The teacher should keep track of the total number of errors (skipped words, mispronounced words, reversed words, etc.) and the total number of correct words to calculate the student's accuracy score.

Finally, measuring reading expression is the most challenging part of assessing fluency. It seems so subjective—how can one reliably measure the expressiveness of a student's oral reading? For the National Assessment of Education Progress, an expressiveness rubric was created to minimize the subjectivity of grading expressiveness (Pinnell et. al, 1995). This simple scale accounts for most of the important variation in oral reading expressiveness. If more detailed information is desired, however,

Rasinski (2004) developed a more sophisticated 4-point expressiveness rubric that helps educators evaluate 1) expression and (speaking) volume, 2) phrasing, 3) smoothness, and 4) pace.

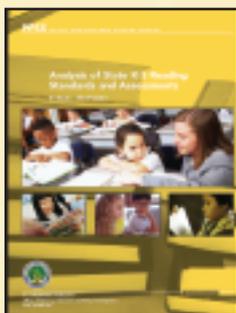
Instruction in fluency should be embedded into reading activities every day. All students benefit from high-quality fluency instruction, albeit in different ways. Good readers tend to improve their expression, while struggling readers make improvements in rate and accuracy. Monitoring gains in all three aspects of fluency through regular assessment will help teachers plan effective instruction for individual students.

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Sebastian Wren is an independent consultant working to improve reading achievement.

Resources



Analysis of State K–3 Reading Standards and Assessments: Final Report (2006)

**U.S. Department of Education
Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development**

As part of the evaluation for the Reading First Program, the U.S. Department of Education conducted an analysis of reading standards and assessments. This report addresses the relationship between state content standards and assessments and the essential components of effective reading instruction. An examination of state assessments and standards was used to

- evaluate the degree to which state reading content standards for K–3 students reflected expectations for learning in the five essential areas of effective reading instruction; and
- determine the extent to which state assessments administered in the K–3 grade span played a role in the measurement of Reading First outcomes in the five areas.

The full report and an executive summary are available at
<http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/other/reading/state-k3-reading.html>.

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Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 E. 7th St., Suite 200 • Austin, TX 78701-3253
800-476-6861 • <http://www.sedl.org>

Editor: Stacey Joyner
Contributing authors: Sebastian Wren
Deborah Reed

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U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

