

Handout: Components of Reading

Alphabetics

Alphabetics is the combination of skills that allows readers to identify words in print. The skills include phonemic awareness (the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds of the language) and a variety of word analysis skills including phonics, word families, and word parts.

Fluency

Fluency is reading quickly, accurately, and with inflection. Fluency affects reading comprehension in several ways. First, fluent readers can dedicate more of their reading effort to comprehension because it is not being spent decoding words and putting them together in meaningful phrases and sentences. Fluent readers are also able to read with proper emphasis and inflection (prosody is the technical term), which adds meaning. Finally, when students increase their reading fluency, their motivation usually increases. Students are able to read more easily, and are more likely to enjoy reading. In addition, fluency instruction allows students to hear their progress, which motivates them to continue with their learning.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is important to reading comprehension in two ways. First, and most obvious, readers need to know what individual words mean to get meaning from the larger text. Second, readers need a good vocabulary to be able to read a broader variety of materials and materials at higher levels. As they read increasingly complex materials, they encounter new words, expanding their vocabularies and allowing them to read new things.

There are different types of vocabulary and different levels of understanding. We have an oral vocabulary—the words we use and understand in listening and speaking, and we have a reading vocabulary—the words we recognize and understand in print. We know some words very well and can use them flexibly, taking advantage of the nuances of their meaning. We know other words at a simple level, but we don't recognize their nuances. And then there are words we don't recognize at all. All of this is affected by the background knowledge we bring to reading.

Reading Comprehension Strategies and Skills

Research says that comprehension is an active process. Good readers access their existing knowledge, set a purpose for reading, check their comprehension, and apply what they learn (strategies). To do this, readers need to recognize patterns in the way information is presented (such as main ideas and details, facts and opinions, sequences) and extract important information to use in new settings.

Adapted from Applying Research in Reading Instruction, Susan McShane, 2005