

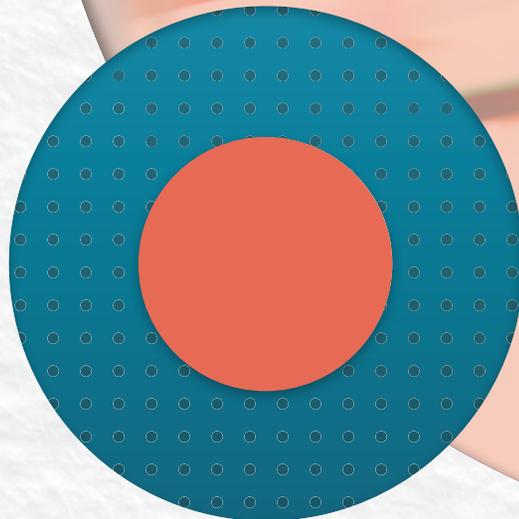


Reading Reimagined

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Standards & Instructional Practices

FOR ADOLESCENT FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY SKILLS



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About This Document	1
How to Use This Document	1
Organization of This Document	2
<hr/>	
Introduction	4
The Current Challenge	4
Understanding the Evidence Behind Skilled Reading for Adolescents	5
Defining Foundational Skills for Adolescents	7
<hr/>	
Adolescent Foundational Reading Skills Standards and Implementation Considerations	8
Overview	8
Accurate Word Reading	10
Fluently Reading Sentences	20
<hr/>	
Appendices	28
Appendix A: More Information About Quality Texts	28
Appendix B: Instructional Techniques	29

About This Document

This resource was developed to support state education agencies (SEAs) in understanding current research on reading development and its implications for what and how foundational reading skills should be taught in core instruction in 4th through 8th grade. It describes which foundational reading skills continue to develop beyond the early elementary years and how these skills enable students to read increasingly complex words and sentences with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension in English Language Arts (ELA) and across other reading-heavy subjects such as science or history.

Although this document identifies specific foundational skills relevant to the adolescent grades, **these skills are intended to be developed through sustained engagement with high-quality, grade-appropriate texts across content areas.** This represents an important shift from how foundational skills are typically taught in the earlier grades. For older students, foundational skills instruction should occur within meaningful reading and content-rich contexts rather than as isolated practice.

In addition, the skills described in this document are not meant to be developed independently. Research is clear that these skills must be taught in an integrated manner. For example, teaching students to break words into meaningful chunks involves both drawing on their orthographic and morphological knowledge as well as implementing a routine to break down multisyllabic words and blend the sounds together. In this way, the skills work together to support students' ability to read, understand, and learn from increasingly complex texts.

Finally, this document defines grade-band specific expectations for **core instruction only**. It does not define intervention models or instructional approaches necessary for supporting students who are below grade-level readers in 4th through 8th grade.¹ However, research is clear that all adolescents, including those with underdeveloped K-3 foundational reading skills, will benefit from this instruction.

How to Use This Document

SEA leaders can use this document to:

- Build a shared understanding of the current research on adolescent foundational reading skills development and what teaching and learning of those skills in core instruction looks like in practice.
- Evaluate and refine state reading standards in 4th through 8th grade and consider how these standards may be incorporated or adapted for states to set clear expectations that foundational reading skills instruction should continue in core instruction beyond 3rd grade.
- Inform state-developed or state-endorsed literacy trainings for teachers of students in 4th through 8th grade.
- Guide decisions about instructional materials, including criteria for state-required or recommended district or school adoptions.
- Influence or partner with educator preparation providers to update coursework and program review requirements to align with the evidence base in adolescent literacy.

While this resource is primarily intended for SEA leaders, it may also support:

- Curriculum developers and publishers in revising high-quality core literacy instructional materials to reflect these expectations for students and teachers.
- Professional learning providers in refining their literacy trainings for educators of students in 4th through 8th grade.
- Educator preparation programs in revising their coursework and practicum experiences for aspiring educators seeking certification in adolescent grades.

Organization of This Document

The document begins with an introduction, which describes the current challenges schools are facing with literacy in the middle grades, followed by a description of the research on foundational reading skills, and finally a definition of foundational reading skills for older readers according to the research.

The sections that follow are broken up into parts consistent with how students develop automatic word-reading skill: **accurate word reading** and **fluently reading sentences**. This set of reading foundational skills, when taught and learned together, supports students in accessing the meaning of increasingly complex texts across subjects in the middle grades and beyond.

Accurate word reading is the ability to recognize and pronounce words correctly and automatically by drawing on orthographic and morphological knowledge, including knowledge of spelling, knowledge of word meanings, and flexible analysis of syllables, roots, and affixes. It enables readers to read even more complex, multisyllabic words fluently (without sounding them out) by efficiently mapping spelling patterns to sounds and meaning.

Fluently reading sentences is the ability to read sentences with appropriate smoothness, intonation, and expression that supports meaning. For adolescents, sentence fluency reflects a reader's understanding of how sentences are built (syntax) and what they mean, allowing them to pause, chunk, and modulate their reading in ways that enhance comprehension rather than prioritize speed.

Each section includes:

1. An overview of the **set of skills and the relevant research**, and
2. Two supporting tables:
 - A table outlining **grade-band instructional standards** that could be added to, or in some cases replace, existing state ELA standards that may not provide enough information or clarity.

- A table describing considerations for implementation, including:

The types of texts and associated text practices students should engage in, as all foundational skills instruction in adolescent grades should occur within the context of a high-quality, grade-appropriate text.

What text-based instruction students need to fully develop foundational reading skills that allow for automatic reading of 4th-8th grade-appropriate texts across content areas.

Examples of recommended instructional practices that research supports in teaching students the identified skills.

Teacher knowledge required to effectively instruct students on the identified skills. As states consider the implications for professional learning, this information may be helpful in understanding what training will be most beneficial to teachers of older readers as they support students in continuing to build their foundational skills.

Assessment practices that support the development of these foundational skills.

Because current research does not support a strictly linear, grade-by-grade progression for many adolescent foundational reading skills, standards are presented by **grade band**. This reflects the reality that students develop these skills over time and that instruction should intentionally span multiple grades rather than be confined to a single grade level.

Introduction

The Current Challenge

In response to declining literacy outcomes, many states have concentrated their efforts on improving reading achievement in the early elementary grades, particularly kindergarten through 3rd grade. This emphasis is rooted in research from the 1990s that popularized the notion that children in grades K-3 are “learning to read,” while adolescents² in grades 4 through 12 are “reading to learn.”³ Over time, this paradigm has strongly influenced state policy decisions and instructional priorities.

The problem with this approach has been increasingly evident. While recent National Assessment of Educational Progress results,⁴ alongside other data,⁵ suggest modest improvements in 4th grade reading performance, 8th grade scores have largely stagnated or declined, even in states with significant state-level, early-grades phonics instructional changes for 4th graders.⁶ Emerging evidence shows that significant numbers of older students do not continue to develop the skills required to maintain proficient reading of grade-level text.⁷ Concerningly, additional research reveals that without these skills, reading growth will remain stagnant in grades 4-8.⁸ This highlights a critical gap in current instructional practices and suggests that early-grade gains are not being sustained as text demands increase in ELA classes as well as other subjects such as science or history.

As a result, after third grade, many students receive limited explicit instruction in foundational reading skills in their core instruction, which limits students’ ability to read texts fluently and accurately. This is occurring despite the

fact that research shows adolescents need foundational reading skill instruction to read increasingly complex texts in the upper grades—for example, instruction on how to read words with three syllables and words that contain advanced morphological patterns such as Latin and Greek roots.⁹

States and instructional materials publishers are positioned to address this challenge. States can utilize policy, accountability, and other softer levers (e.g., guidance documents, incentives, communications) to signal the importance of explicit foundational literacy skills instruction beyond the early grades in core instruction. In doing so, they can show the alignment of state academic standards with the growing body of research encouraging the continued development of foundational reading skills in adolescent learners. However, a recent analysis by Watershed Advisors found that most states do not include explicit foundational reading skills standards beyond 3rd or 4th grade for core instruction, with only a small number of notable exceptions.¹⁰ This gap in standards may contribute to inconsistent instructional attention to key word-reading and fluency skills needed in the upper grades, leaving many students unprepared to meet the demands of complex academic texts across the curriculum.

Publishers of high-quality instructional materials can also play a role by adapting core curricular products to reflect the emerging research base on adolescent foundational reading skills. This includes embedding appropriate instructional routines, practice opportunities, and teacher supports within

existing lessons, as well as reviewing text selections to ensure they provide students with meaningful opportunities to practice the foundational skills within the context of a high-quality text. As was the case with the Science of Reading movement in early literacy, achieving sustained, classroom-level change at scale will require coordinated action across states, publishers, and other key stakeholders, including Educational Preparation Programs.

This document was created to begin to address the challenge in adolescent literacy. It outlines the research base on foundational reading skills for older readers and translates that evidence to define instructional standards and describe what effective implementation looks like in practice.

Understanding the Evidence Behind Skilled Reading for Adolescents

Strong reading outcomes are the result of deliberate instructional choices grounded in decades of research on how students learn to read. That process continues to evolve as texts become more complex in upper grade levels.

Ultimately, the purpose of reading instruction is comprehension: understanding and interpreting what is read and making it a part of their knowledge base. Research has consistently shown that a reader's process of comprehending a text is essentially a mathematical equation of their ability to decode, or accurately and fluently read the words, and their linguistic comprehension, which is the knowledge of what those words mean.¹¹ When either component is weak, comprehension suffers. This relationship between word reading (decoding) and language comprehension has long been known as the *Simple View of Reading*. And while the research has been well established in earlier grades, its implications for how students continue to

develop their reading skills and what instruction should look like in older grades are evolving.

Importantly, decoding is not just accurately “sounding out” words. Skilled readers recognize words automatically, allowing them to devote their attention to what the words *mean* rather than spending cognitive effort on deciphering the code. When word reading becomes **automatic** (the goal of decoding instruction), students can focus on understanding ideas, making connections, and learning from the text.

Although helpful, the *Simple View of Reading* falls short of the more nuanced relationship between decoding and comprehension when needed to determine instructional components needed to shore up reading skills, particularly in older grades. These components do not develop independently. As students engage with texts, multiple processes work simultaneously. Readers draw on knowledge of letter and spelling patterns (orthographic processing) as well as morphological knowledge (e.g., Latin and Greek roots) in conjunction with their knowledge of word meanings to help them pronounce the particular patterns in those words. In other words, word reading and meaning reinforce one another, especially as texts grow more complex.¹²

Traditionally, the different aspects of both decoding and language comprehension have been illustrated as strands of a single rope that, when woven together, form skilled reading. This is called Scarborough's Reading Rope.¹³ The various strands that make up skilled reading (for example, phonological awareness, knowledge of vocabulary, or inferencing skills) can either strengthen or weaken other strands of the rope.¹⁴ Weak skills in any of these areas in turn weaken the rope altogether, further diminishing a reader's comprehension as a whole (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 | Scarborough's Rope¹⁵



Based on Scarborough's Rope (2001)

This matters greatly for older readers. Beginning in 4th grade, texts presented in classrooms change in important ways. Words become longer and less familiar. Sentences become denser and more syntactically complex. Students are expected to read across disciplines, often encountering technical vocabulary and abstract concepts for the first time. As a result, older readers increasingly rely on:

- Word meanings and the context to read automatically
- Knowledge of advanced morphological and spelling patterns, including roots and affixes
- Efficient reading of multisyllabic words
- Understanding of sentence structure

For students who have not developed these skills, reading becomes slow, effortful, and frustrating—regardless of how strong their decoding skill, reasoning ability, or background knowledge may be.

Critically, research does **not show gains** for adolescents who work on foundational reading skills in isolation.¹⁶ However, research **does** show gains for adolescents who work on foundational reading skills in comprehension-focused instruction.¹⁷ Thus, older students' work on fluent word reading must be followed by reading the text for meaning to impact their reading skills.

Defining Foundational Skills for Adolescents

So, what does the evidence suggest about how foundational reading skills should be defined for readers in 4th through 8th grade and beyond?¹⁸ Historically, foundational reading skills have been defined based on evidence from early elementary-aged students. Based on this evidence, the National Reading Panel¹⁹ defines foundational reading skills for younger readers as phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency skills needed to accurately decode words. When this definition was developed, there was limited evidence to guide how foundational

reading skills should be understood and how they develop for older students. Research has since emerged to show that spelling also plays an important role in word reading, both for younger and older children,²⁰ which highlights the importance of the reciprocal nature of reading and writing.²¹

Over the past two and a half decades, more research has surfaced on what core instruction is needed to develop foundational reading skills in older readers. This research makes clear that students' understanding of more complex foundational reading skills is beneficial beyond just early grades and is necessary as students engage with longer, denser, and more academically demanding texts. It underscores that all students in older grades benefit from foundational reading skills instruction as a part of their core curriculum—though some students may also need interventions to address gaps in their foundational skills from earlier grades to allow them to access grade-level content.

Based on this emerging research base, scholars have proposed a definition of foundational reading skills for adolescents:

Foundational literacy skills for adolescents are the word reading, word knowledge, sentence structure, and fluency skills that adolescents need to access sentence- and paragraph-level meaning of texts that promote academic and personal growth.²²

This definition expands the concept of foundational reading skills in two important ways by including **word knowledge** and **sentence structure**. This reflects the reality that older students must read and understand increasingly difficult words and navigate longer, more syntactically complex sentences. It is important to note that word-reading skills include an emphasis on spelling, which highlights the reciprocal relationship between writing and reading.²³ It also reinforces the ultimate goal of foundational skills instruction for older readers: **to enable students to access meaning in appropriately complex texts.**

Adolescent Foundational Reading Skills Standards and Implementation Considerations

Overview

Adolescent foundational reading skills are inextricably tied to the demands of the text, much in part because “the relationship between decoding ability and reading comprehension is inherently situated in text complexity.”²⁴ Thus, **all foundational skills core instruction for adolescent students should happen within the context of high-quality instructional materials and grade-appropriate texts** that contain features needed to develop automaticity.

Features of texts for older readers that allow them to develop these automaticity skills include:

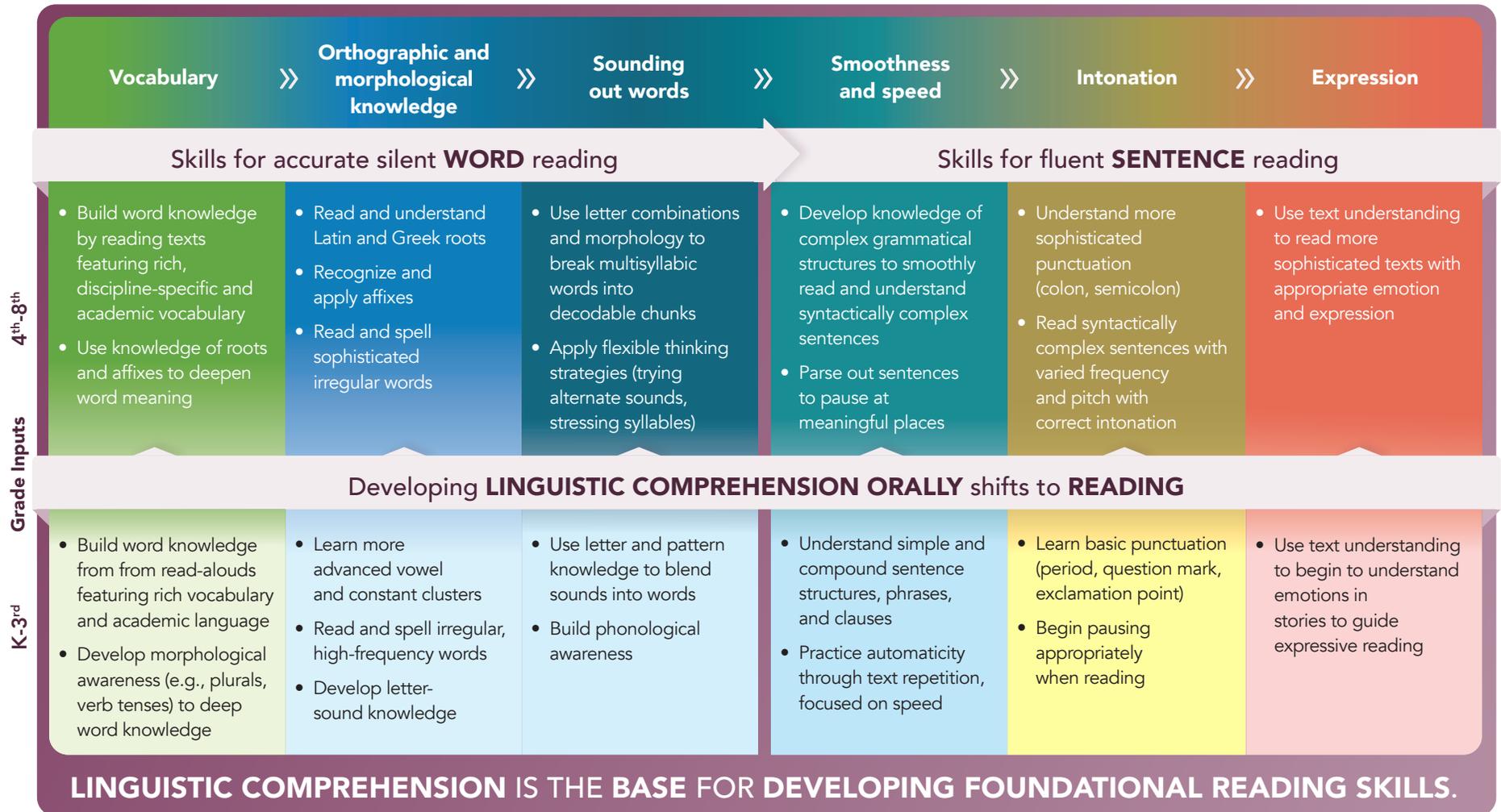
- Sophisticated vocabulary, including multisyllabic words with both rare and common roots and affixes, and
- Advanced syntactical structures that contain multiple phrases, clauses, and sophisticated punctuation (for example, semicolons or em dashes).

Moreover, because older readers benefit from foundational reading instruction that is embedded in strong comprehension work,²⁵ these features in students’ high-quality instructional materials should take place in the context of **purposeful reading experiences** in texts that **build meaningful knowledge** of science, history, geography, and culture;²⁶ develop readers’ **critical**

thinking; and **engage readers in relevant and interesting topics**.²⁷ Further, reading experiences should facilitate deep comprehension in longer works, including full novels, and provide opportunities for students to read multiple texts on the same topic,²⁸ which allows for deeper and more textured perspectives and opportunities for repetition of vocabulary necessary for building automaticity of academic words. See Appendix A for a more nuanced description of the research on text quality.

Becoming an automatic reader is made up primarily of two major interrelated components: **accurate word reading** and **fluent sentence reading**. Given the text demands in grades 4 through 8, the skills needed to read words and sentences with automaticity differ for older readers. However, these skills build on foundational reading skills that children develop in grades K-3. Together, these skills enable students to read increasingly complex texts efficiently and with comprehension. These skills develop in conjunction with comprehension, which is primarily taught orally in grades K-3 through read-alouds that provide younger learners with exposure to complex vocabulary and language structures. In fact, linguistic comprehension is the base for developing word-reading skills. In grades 4-8, comprehension shifts and is developed primarily through silent reading. Figure 2 provides a high-level overview of how these skills develop over time.

Figure 2 | Development of Automatic Word-Reading Skill



Example words

Grades 4th-8th

contrast, consequently, relative equilibrium, etiquette, omniscient

Grades K-3rd

my, cat, little, will, make, say

Example sentences

Furthermore, on the left hand as you enter the exquisite accommodation, a certain room or office, about fifteen feet square, and of a lofty height, with two of its arched windows commanding a view ...

I wanted to go to the park, but it started raining.
The big dog ran fast.

In the sections that follow, the instructional standards and guidance on how they are implemented are derived for the foundational reading skills identified in the “4th-8th Grade Inputs” row in Figure 2. **These standards and guidance are intended for core instruction for all students and should be implemented not only in ELA classrooms, but also across other reading-intensive subjects such as science and history.**

While many students enter 4th grade with well-developed foundational skills, others do not. Students who have not yet solidified K-3 foundational skills may require additional learning beyond core instruction to address these gaps. Importantly, **this instruction should reflect what research indicates is effective for older readers** and should not mirror early elementary instructional approaches such as those outlined in the “K-3rd Grade Inputs” row in Figure 2. At the same time, **gaps in K-3 foundational skills should not prevent students from engaging in the 4th through 8th grade foundational skills outlined in this document; rather, these skills should be taught in tandem.**

Finally, in the early grades, foundational skills development must occur alongside the intentional building of linguistic comprehension. This includes exposing younger students to sophisticated vocabulary and complex sentence structures through practices such as rich read-alouds—foundations that support later success with the more advanced foundational skills required in 4th through 8th grade.²⁹ For students who did not receive that rich linguistic instruction in grades K-3, it is even more important to build that knowledge in grades 4-8 following the guidance provided in this document.

Outlined here is a more detailed description of the skills adolescents need to develop the ability to accurately read words and fluently read sentences that are typical of 4th through 8th grade-appropriate texts. The tables that follow identify the skills students need to develop accurate word reading and sentence fluency, along with the instruction that will help build those skills and the types of text practice readers need to engage in to solidify these skills alongside building comprehension.

Accurate Word Reading

Accurate word reading is the ability to recognize and pronounce words correctly and automatically by drawing on orthographic and morphological knowledge, including knowledge of spelling; knowledge of word meanings; and flexible analysis of syllables, roots, and affixes. It enables readers to read even more complex, multisyllabic words fluently (without sounding them out) by efficiently mapping spelling patterns to sounds and meaning.

In the adolescent grades, where the texts become increasingly complex, accurate word reading develops along a progression—from supporting students in orthographically mapping sound/symbol relationships to applying appropriate stress on syllables to ultimately reading words automatically without having to sound them out. Spelling, which includes etymological knowledge, plays an important role in helping readers orthographically map, which is the mental process of storing letter patterns in sounds into long-term memory. Learning how to read sophisticated multisyllabic words automatically is a combination of three interrelated components:

1. **Deep orthographic and morphological knowledge**, which includes both knowledge of advanced sounds and patterns as well as knowledge of Latin and Greek roots and affixes, and both regular and irregular spellings, which is reinforced by strong etymological knowledge;
2. **Vocabulary** (or word meaning), particularly of many longer, multisyllabic and academic words, that draws on the reader’s morphological knowledge; and
3. **Multisyllabic word reading** (or sounding out words), which includes knowing how to break longer words into chunks, read those chunks, and put them together, using flexible thinking to correct mispronunciations³⁰ and with appropriate stress on syllables, into a word that makes sense.

Spelling also plays an important instructional role in developing accurate word reading, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing. In this way, writing reinforces spelling knowledge, and learning to encode roots, affixes, and irregularly spelled words helps readers form neural connections that improve word-reading skills.³¹ Adolescents must focus on how to spell words with the roots and affixes they are studying across content areas (e.g., *equilibrium*, *omniscient*), in addition to learning to spell academic words (e.g., *contrast*, *consequently*).³² Spelling instruction should also help adolescents understand the etymology of words, which can help readers understand why words may not follow typical spelling rules (e.g., *sleight*, which is derived from an old Norse word) and words that are borrowed from other languages (e.g. *etiquette*, a word with French origin).

Vocabulary is also important. In particular, readers need to use their knowledge of sophisticated language and discipline-specific words to accurately sound out the longer words in grade-appropriate texts, and that vocabulary knowledge also supports text comprehension.

Vocabulary knowledge should also include familiarity with academic language—for example, knowing the meaning of and how to pronounce the most frequent academic words, such as those on the [academic word list](#) and the [word zones list](#). Morphological knowledge plays a key role in building vocabulary as well, particularly because many discipline-specific and academic words common in texts that adolescents encounter across subjects in 4th through 8th grade contain Greek or Latin roots.³³

These components of accurate word reading should not be taught in isolation. They are deeply intertwined and mutually reinforcing to help readers decipher and understand more complex words. For example, helping students read longer, multisyllabic words requires text-based instruction that helps students break the words into more manageable chunks and understand which syllable to stress when reading the word. Because there are multiple pronunciations of different letter combinations (e.g., *chaos*, *colonel*, words with multiple pronunciations such as *invalid* as a noun vs. adjective), students must learn to flexibly adjust how they segment and stress syllables—drawing on orthographic, morphological, and vocabulary knowledge, as well as the context of the text—to make them into a word that makes sense.

From this evidence base, Table 1 provides instructional standards and considerations for implementation of these standards for accurate word reading.

Table 1 | Instructional Standards to Develop Accurate Word Reading

Upper Elementary (Grades 4-5)

Orthographic and Morphological Knowledge and Spelling

Students will identify, read, and pronounce words in high-quality, grade-appropriate texts using *concrete* and *common* affixes and simple roots, for example:

- **Prefixes:** re, un, dis, uni, bi, tri
- **Comparative suffixes:** est, iest, ier, er
- **Roots:** auto, chron, graph

Examples of irregular or sophisticated spelling words: chaos, relief, scissors.

Students will analyze words to understand etymological makeup and history of *concrete* and *common* academic words.³⁴

Multisyllabic Word Reading

Students will use word analysis skills and orthographic knowledge to sound out *concrete* and *common* multisyllabic words while reading high-quality, grade-appropriate texts.

While reading, students will use flexible thinking to try different sound patterns when sounding out multisyllabic words until they get to the accurate pronunciation.

Vocabulary

Students will use knowledge of word meanings of *more concrete* and *common* academic and discipline-specific words (e.g., chronology, inappropriate, organism) to sound out words accurately while reading high-quality, grade-appropriate texts.

Table 1 | Instructional Standards to Develop Accurate Word Reading (cont.)

Early Middle School (Grades 6-7)

Orthographic and Morphological Knowledge and Spelling

Students will identify, read, and pronounce words in high-quality, grade-appropriate texts using *concrete* but *more abstract* Latin and Greek roots and affixes.

- **Prefixes:** pro, ante, bene
- **Suffixes:** ness, ist
- **Roots:** polis, viv, dic

Examples of irregular or sophisticated spelling words: etiquette, sleight, benevolent.

Students will analyze words to understand etymological makeup and history of *common* but *more abstract* academic words.

Multisyllabic Word Reading

Students will use word analysis skills and orthographic knowledge to sound out *common* but *more abstract* multisyllabic words while reading high-quality, grade-appropriate texts.

While reading, students will use flexible thinking to try different sound patterns when sounding out multisyllabic words until they get to the accurate pronunciation.

Vocabulary

Students will use knowledge of word meanings of *common* but *more abstract* academic and discipline-specific words (antebellum, benediction, hydrosphere) to sound out words accurately while reading high-quality, grade-appropriate texts.

Figure 1 | Instructional Standards to Develop Accurate Word Reading (cont.)

Upper Middle School (Grade 8)

Orthographic and Morphological Knowledge and Spelling

Students will identify, read, and pronounce words in high-quality, grade-appropriate texts using *less common* and *more abstract* Latin and Greek roots and affixes.

- **Affixes:** ex, ob, circum
- **Roots:** press, purg, pen, sist, astra

Examples of irregular or sophisticated spelling words: colonel, silhouette, omniscient.

Students will analyze words to understand etymological makeup and history of *less common* and *more abstract* academic words.

Multisyllabic Word Reading

Students will use word analysis skills and orthographic knowledge to sound out *less common* and *more abstract* multisyllabic words while reading high-quality, grade-appropriate texts.

While reading, students will use flexible thinking to try different sound patterns when sounding out multisyllabic words until they get to the accurate pronunciation.

Vocabulary

Students will use knowledge of word meanings of *more abstract* and *less common* academic and discipline-specific words (circumvent, euphemism, organelle) to sound out words accurately while reading high-quality, grade-appropriate texts.

Standards Gap Analysis: Accurate Word Reading

What Many States Already Address

Some states include standards that reference word analysis skills or the use of orthographic knowledge to read multisyllabic words, particularly in 4th and 5th grade. For example, [Virginia ELA standards 5.FFR.3](#) states that “The student will apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills to decode (read) unfamiliar words in grade level text.” Many states also include standards related to spelling accuracy and vocabulary development. For example, the [Minnesota ELA standards for 6th grade in Foundations of Reading](#) state that students should “apply spelling patterns and rules to spell words with French and Latin word origin authentically in writing.”

What Is Missing or Underdeveloped

Very few states have literacy standards³⁵ that explicitly address how students learn to read complex, multisyllabic words automatically, including flexible word-reading strategies (e.g., adjusting syllable stress or pronunciation).

Relatedly, morphology instruction is mentioned in many state standards as well as the Common Core; however, it only addresses using roots or affixes to understand the meaning of words in context, rather than how building strong morphological knowledge can help readers.

Spelling standards rarely articulate how spelling instruction supports orthographic mapping and automatic word reading. For example, the Common Core expects 4th through 12th graders to “demonstrate command ... of spelling” and “spell correctly” in their writing, without providing any guidance on specific words, the progression students should make across grade levels in spelling, or the importance of spelling to their reading skill. Similarly, no states provide information about the importance of etymology or what kinds of words students may need explicit instruction on to improve spelling and, consequently, word reading.

Similarly, though most states have standards around vocabulary development, the standards often lack guidance on how it is integrated with automatic word reading. For example, vocabulary does not appear in the Common Core reading standards, but appears in the writing standards, suggesting students need to “use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic” without providing much guidance on what kinds of words or how students should be learning this vocabulary. Further, the same standard appears across grade levels, providing little evidence as to the progression that students should make in their vocabulary development. There is no mention in any states about the importance of vocabulary knowledge on word reading.

Table 2 | Considerations for Implementation of Instructional Standards to Develop Accurate Word Reading

Across Grades 4-8	
<p>What type of texts do adolescents need to read and what text practices should accompany reading these texts?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice reading texts that include targeted Latin and Greek roots, affixes, and irregular spellings as well as sophisticated, multisyllabic vocabulary. • In these texts, practice using word analysis skills to break the word down into syllables or smaller chunks and engage in flexible thinking, relying on vocabulary knowledge, to sound it out accurately. • Wide reading across content areas in grade-appropriate texts coupled with opportunities to talk about the text using key vocabulary so that the texts are building word knowledge. • Explicit teacher feedback while adolescents read out loud to support students in applying newly learned morphological and spelling knowledge during reading.
<p>What explicit text-based instruction do students need?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spelling and etymology instruction that helps solidify orthographic and morphological knowledge, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latin and Greek roots and affixes • Irregular spellings and how to pronounce those words • Instruction on word analysis skills, including learning a technique for breaking words into syllables or meaningful chunks and looking for familiar word parts and then sounding out those chunks or syllables. • Instruction on how to engage in flexible thinking and trying different sounds and syllable breaks until a word makes sense.³⁶ • Text-based vocabulary instruction that deepens students' knowledge of words in the texts they are reading and helps them use the words orally and in writing.

Table 2 | Considerations for Implementation of Instructional Standards to Develop Accurate Word Reading (cont.)

Across Grades 4-8

Recommended
instructional practices

- Practice a routine for how to break multisyllabic words into smaller chunks and read those chunks, while using morphological and orthographic knowledge to divide the words into syllables. For example, the BEST routine* helps students break the words into identifiable chunks and put those chunks back together to make them into a word that makes sense.
- Practice a routine to help students learn how to “flex” sounds when reading multisyllabic words, also referred to as [set for variability](#). For example, teachers can put a word on the board, pronounce it incorrectly, and have students try to sound it out correctly, flexing the sounds the teacher missed.*
- Spend five minutes or less to practice reading 3-5 of the most difficult words at the beginning of the lesson using the routine for how to teach multisyllabic words and the routine for flexing sounds.
- Teach and review morphological patterns in key multisyllabic words before or after the lesson using a routine for teaching roots and affixes.* For example, teachers introduce the root, share the definition, and share example words and definitions for those words. Students generate more words using that root or affix and, with teacher support, practice reading those words and discuss their meaning.
- Use organic comprehension-based techniques to support vocabulary development in ways that help students use the words, see the relationship between words, and support comprehension of the passage. For example, probable passage* asks students to categorize key vocabulary prior to reading, read for understanding, revisit those words after reading, and shift categories based on reading. Students then use the categories and words to summarize the passage.
- Explicitly teach spelling, including etymologies of words, so that students can solidify their automatic word-reading skills.

Table 2 | Considerations for Implementation of Instructional Standards to Develop Accurate Word Reading (cont.)

	Across Grades 4-8
Teacher knowledge required	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wide reading and a broad knowledge of appropriate texts for the grade level(s) they teach.• An understanding of how automaticity develops and how to teach advanced word analysis skills.• Deep orthographic and morphological knowledge, in particular of Latin and Greek roots and affixes.• Familiarity with a technique for sounding out words to teach their students, such as BEST.*• An understanding of how to teach students to stress different syllables or try different sounds for word chunks (flexible thinking) and ideas for how to teach it.• An understanding of how vocabulary develops and how readers store word meanings.• An understanding of how to choose the most important words to focus on during text-based lessons.³⁷• Familiarity with text-based techniques for supporting word development and comprehension.• An understanding of how to integrate and incorporate this instruction into their disciplines to enhance teaching in their content area.• An understanding of how to assess adolescents' word-reading skills and use that information to target instruction.

Table 2 | Considerations for Implementation of Instructional Standards to Develop Accurate Word Reading (cont.)

	Across Grades 4-8
<p>Recommended assessment practices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A screener that is normed and validated for older readers is recommended to identify advanced foundational reading skill needs in the upper grades,³⁸ such as the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capti Read-Basix is a brief, comprehensive screener that can identify areas of literacy needs, including foundational skills for children in grades 3-12. • ROAR is a brief, free computer-adaptive assessment that can be used to identify foundational skills needs for children in grades K-12. • Diagnostic and informal measures are recommended for progress monitoring.³⁹ Examples of diagnostic assessment follow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morphological knowledge can be assessed through informal assessments of Latin and Greek root meanings or word generation tasks that ask students to generate words with particular affixes or roots. • Spelling can be assessed by asking students to spell the words you have been studying. • Vocabulary can be assessed informally in curriculum-based measures. • For ideas on assessing students' progress in multisyllabic word-reading skill, see fluency assessments in next section.

* See Appendix B for a more detailed description of these techniques.

Fluently Reading Sentences

Fluently reading sentences is the ability to read sentences with appropriate smoothness, intonation, and expression that supports meaning. For adolescents, sentence fluency reflects a reader's understanding of how sentences are built (syntax) and what they mean, allowing them to pause, chunk, and modulate their reading in ways that enhance comprehension rather than prioritize speed.

The second component of adolescent foundational reading skills includes reading sentences fluently. Fluency is not simply an offspring of automatic word reading, though automatic word reading is a prerequisite for smoothness. Rather, reading sentences fluently is more closely related to reading comprehension than word reading.⁴⁰ Importantly, each component of fluency builds upon the others in the following ways:

- **Smoothness** is knowing when and how to parse sentences out and pause at places that make the sentences make sense. This requires syntax knowledge, including how to read sentences with multiple advanced phrases and clauses.
- **Intonation** is how to vary frequency and pitch while reading sentences smoothly. Intonation requires smoothness *and* knowledge of advanced grammar, such as sophisticated punctuation and conjunctions.
- **Expression** is reading texts with appropriate emotion, while reading smoothly and with appropriate intonation. This requires smoothness, intonation, *and* understanding the meaning of the text.

Speed is an important aspect of fluency for younger readers, though research shows this is less important for older readers⁴¹ because as texts get more complex, readers need to slow down to parse out the more complex

sentences and sound out the longer, more sophisticated vocabulary.⁴² Consequently, teaching adolescent students to read with **smoothness** (instead of speed) is more effective than focusing on speed alone.⁴³ To read smoothly, readers need to know where to pause⁴⁴ and how to chunk sentences out into meaningful parts.⁴⁵ This means that readers need knowledge of advanced syntactical structures such as different types of phrases or clauses so they can understand where to pause, which helps them break up longer sentences into smaller but meaningful units to help readers understand the information more easily.⁴⁶

Related to the components of reading sentences fluently is prosody, which involves appropriate **expression, intonation,** and phrasing to convey meaning and make texts sound natural and engaging when reading.⁴⁷ Reading sentences with correct intonation requires knowing how to vary frequency and pitch while reading. This means readers need knowledge of sophisticated punctuation, such as em dashes, semicolons, and quotations, as well as knowledge of the meaning of different types of conjunctions (e.g., subordinating, correlating) and what different verb tenses convey. Prosody in grades 4-8 builds on readers' knowledge of more advanced syntax structures that are prevalent in middle-grade texts, and research has shown that a stronger understanding of syntax is correlated with higher reading comprehension.⁴⁸ Expressive reading requires that readers understand what they are reading so they can voice relevant emotions or expressions while reading. Thus, understanding anaphoric references (using a word, such as a pronoun, to refer back to another word) and pronoun antecedents (the word being referred to) is key for expressive reading.⁴⁹

Table 3 | Instructional Standards to Fluently Read Sentences

Upper Elementary (Grades 4-5)	Early Middle School (Grades 6-7)	Upper Middle School (Grade 8)
<p>Students will read a variety of high-quality, grade-appropriate texts with smoothness, correct intonation, and meaningful expression using their grammatical knowledge (e.g., identifying subject/predicate) to support comprehension, including texts with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sophisticated punctuation (e.g., colons and quotations), • pronoun antecedents in the prior sentence, • multiple noun and verb phrases, and • occasional conjunctions. 	<p>Students will read a variety of high-quality, grade-appropriate texts with smoothness, correct intonation, and meaningful expression using their grammatical knowledge (e.g., identifying types of phrases) to support comprehension, including texts with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sophisticated punctuation (e.g., semicolons and parenthesis), • pronoun antecedents 1-2 sentences prior, • sentences that contain 4 or more phrases (e.g., prepositional) and clauses (e.g., independent and dependent), and • regular use of conjunctions. 	<p>Students will read a variety of high-quality, grade-appropriate texts with smoothness, correct intonation, and meaningful expression using their grammatical knowledge (e.g., identifying types of clauses) to support comprehension, including texts with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sophisticated punctuation (e.g., ellipses and em dashes), • pronoun antecedents 3 or more sentences prior, • sentences that contain 5 or more advanced phrases (e.g., adjectival and adverbial) and clauses (e.g., relative), and • frequent conjunctions.

Standards Gap Analysis: Fluently Reading Sentences

What Many States Already Address

Some states include standards in 4th-5th grade that reference reading smoothly with appropriate expression and intonation. For example, in grades 4-8, Virginia includes this standard: “Read a variety of grade-level complex text with accuracy, automaticity, appropriate rate, and meaningful expression in successive readings to support comprehension. Monitor while reading to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding when necessary.”

Additionally, in a small number of cases, elements related to sentence structure appear in writing standards. For example, [in grade 5 in Arkansas](#), there are standards that require students to use relative pronouns, correlative conjunctions, and prepositional phrases in their writing. In grade 7-8, students are asked to “produce compound-complex sentences, using dependent clauses, subordinating conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, correlative conjunctions, and coordinating conjunctions” and “identify types of phrases and clauses based on their functions.”

What Is Missing or Underdeveloped

Few states extend explicit expectations for sentence fluency—including smoothness, intonation, and expression—into 6th-8th grade and beyond. For example, in the Common Core, 6th-8th grade students are asked to “read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently,” but no explicit fluency standards exist.

Likewise, most states provide little to no guidance on the syntactic complexity students must learn to navigate in reading to comprehend texts, particularly for sentences with multiple phrases or clauses. Where syntax is addressed, it is often confined to writing standards rather than explicitly connected to reading fluency and comprehension. For example, the Common Core, under the heading *Use of Language*, includes the following standard: “use knowledge

of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening” by asking students to “vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style” and “maintain consistency in style and tone,” with no mention of how to use their knowledge of conventions to understand texts, which would support fluent reading.

Explicit instruction in *comprehending* sophisticated grammatical structures is needed to fully support adolescents’ foundational reading skills and should begin in earlier grade bands. Comprehension of sophisticated grammatical structures in earlier grades will lay a strong foundation for the incorporation of that grammatical knowledge into adolescents’ writing later on. Teaching explicit grammatical knowledge to support adolescent writing development is helpful, and these grammar skills may transfer to further support readers’ comprehension.

Table 4 | Considerations for Implementation of Instructional Standards to Fluently Read Sentences

Across Grades 4-8

What type of texts do adolescents need to read and what text practices should they be supported to develop?

- Readers need practice reading and interpreting high-quality, grade-appropriate texts across content areas with the following types of grammatical structures.⁵⁰
 - Different types of phrases, including noun and verb phrases, appositives, adjectival and adverbial phrases, and prepositional phrases;
 - Different types of clauses, such as independent, dependent, and relative clauses;
 - Identifying parts of speech and the difference between subject and predicate in a sentence in service of understanding the meaning so that learners can read sentences with correct expression and intonation;
 - Sophisticated punctuation (colons, semicolons, ellipses, em dashes) to aid in understanding and fluently reading complex sentences;
 - Pronoun antecedents and practice locating and understanding anaphoric references, especially when they are multiple sentences apart or in different paragraphs; and
 - Different types of conjunctions (e.g., subordinative, correlative) and their meaning and how that connects ideas across sentences.
- Students need practice reading texts that contain the features listed above both out loud, accompanied by teacher feedback that supports fluent reading, and silently.

Table 4 | Considerations for Implementation of Instructional Standards to Fluently Read Sentences (cont.)

	Across Grades 4-8
What explicit instruction do students need?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instruction in reading smoothly, including brief modeling so students can hear fluent reading of texts that contain long and/or sophisticated sentences.• In texts that contain complex grammatical structures and features, instruction on prosodic reading, including where to pause when reading, how to vary pitch and frequency as students read, and what expressive reading sounds like.• Instruction in interpreting syntactically complex sentences, including identifying the function of different phrases and clauses, conjunctions, and different types of advanced punctuation.• Instruction in identifying and finding pronoun antecedents and anaphoric references.

Table 4 | Considerations for Implementation of Instructional Standards to Fluently Read Sentences (cont.)

Across Grades 4-8

Recommended
instructional practices

- Instruction that supports students to better understand chunks of sentences, such as phrases and clauses, and complex grammatical structures. Examples of these practices may include the following:
 - Instruction in sentence combining and expansion can improve students' syntactical knowledge; in particular, it increases their understanding of different types of phrases and clauses and supports comprehension.
 - Reading complex sentences, then paraphrasing those sentences either orally or in writing, both increases students' syntactical knowledge and supports comprehension. For example, the juicy sentences protocol* helps adolescents choose and unpack a syntactically dense sentence.
 - During teacher read-alouds, teachers can model locating pronoun antecedents and then, with students, label pronouns. Have students repeat when they read silently and then discuss the anaphoric references they labeled and correct errors.
- Fluency instruction using a short excerpt of a longer text for 5-10 minutes. Examples of this instruction may include:
 - Provide instruction and practice for students to read with emotion. For example, *Say it Like a Character** encourages students to select a portion of the text and practice reading that text the way a character would read it, then perform their interpretation for a partner or the class. *The Emotion Reading Game** turns expressive reading into a game where students guess the emotions that their classmates are using.
 - Instruction on prosody using [a prosody rubric](#), which outlines characteristics of prosodic reading. This may look like asking students to record themselves reading a short passage. After, students listen and assess their own prosody using the rubric.
 - Opportunities for students to read with a model (while following along in the text themselves) can improve smoothness, intonation, and expression.⁵¹ This practice is most impactful when followed by the opportunity for students to practice reading aloud, with teacher feedback, after listening to the model.
 - Recitation (including but not limited to poetry), public speaking opportunities, and performative reading activities (such as performing a play or using reader's theater) can all support students in developing fluent reading skills.

Table 4 | Considerations for Implementation of Instructional Standards to Fluently Read Sentences (cont.)

Across Grades 4-8

Teacher knowledge required

- An understanding of how to read and understand texts with complex grammatical structures, including:
 - Multiple advanced phrases (adverbial, prepositional) and clauses (independent, dependent, relative) in one sentence,
 - Pronoun antecedents and anaphoric references that are multiple sentences apart,
 - Meaning and function of conjunctions, and
 - Discipline-specific grammatical structures.
- An understanding of the components of fluent reading and how to integrate them to enhance their core instruction using short excerpts of longer texts from their discipline.
- How to identify a complex text in their discipline and understand what is difficult about the text so they can provide targeted fluency instruction.⁵²
- How to assess and understand students' fluency needs.
- How to give targeted feedback on students' oral reading to improve their prosody.
- Familiarity with the techniques and practices described above and an understanding of how to use them.

Table 4 | Considerations for Implementation of Instructional Standards to Fluently Read Sentences (cont.)

Across Grades 4-8	
Assessment practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As mentioned in the previous section, screening is important, and assessments such as Capti and ROAR can provide helpful information about adolescents' foundational skills needs.• Diagnostic and informal measures are recommended for progress monitoring of fluent sentence reading, including:⁵³<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Administration of a one-minute fluency measure using a grade-appropriate passage, capturing the reader's speed (words correct per minute) and accuracy. This can be conducted across subjects using texts typical of a teacher's content area.• Prosody measured alongside speed and accuracy during a one-minute read or separately. Using a prosody rubric is encouraged. Growth in prosody is an easy way to see improvement for adolescents.

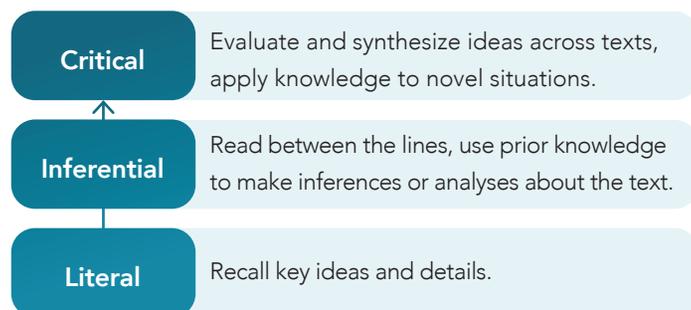
* See Appendix B for a more detailed description of these techniques.

Appendices

Appendix A: More Information About Quality Texts

The text plays a critical role in foundational reading instruction, and quality texts are critical for building both foundational reading skills and reader comprehension. Research on reading comprehension for older students highlights important nuances to be considered when selecting texts for instruction that reflect the full reading experience. First, research shows that reading comprehension is an interaction between the reader, the text, and the activity.⁵⁴ Meaning, the *purpose* for reading (the activity) must be aligned with the *text* itself while considering what the *reader* brings to the reading experience. And second, reading comprehension happens in layers (see Figure 3), and a high-quality set of texts can help students achieve the highest levels of reading comprehension.

Figure 3 | Layers of Comprehension⁵⁵



Therefore, the following questions should be considered when determining if a set of texts adolescent students engage with is high-quality and enables students to build their foundational reading skills:⁵⁶

- **Purpose and knowledge building:** Do the texts provide deep and wide knowledge of science, history, geography, and culture?
- **Coherence and relevance:** Do students read text sets—multiple relevant texts about a topic—that facilitate learning across the text set?
- **Critical thinking:** Do the texts build students' critical thinking skills by requiring students to use deeper thinking skills and discipline-specific thinking, or interpret multiple meanings to fully understand the text?
- **Interest and engagement:** Do some of the texts engage readers with the real-world relevance of the topic and engage readers' interest?

Finally, as previously mentioned, research indicates that adolescents need a mixture of both shorter and longer texts, including some exposure to entire novels. Reading an entire novel allows adolescents to grasp the fullness of a complex story, develop stamina and necessary attention skills needed to engage with more difficult reading,⁵⁷ and more fully learn the skills that are being taught.⁵⁸ While the evidence base is still growing on the impact of students reading entire novels in comparison to shorter texts or excerpts, emerging research⁵⁹ suggests that providing some opportunities for adolescents to read full-length novels is a necessary step in developing adolescents' foundational reading skills, alongside providing opportunities for them to also read shorter texts.

Appendix B: Instructional Techniques

Here is a list of suggested instructional routines. This is not a comprehensive list, but rather contains some examples of the types of instructional routines appropriate for adolescents that can help them meet the foundational reading skills standards.

Technique	Skills Addressed	Description	Instructional Notes or Modifications
BEST*	<i>Accurate word reading</i>	BEST: B reak off the parts you know, E xamine what's left and underline the vowels, S ay each part, T ry to blend the parts together to make it a word you recognize.	This strategy is best taught through modeling for the whole class, then providing partner practice with teacher support. After 3-5 weeks of 5 minutes daily practice, most students are able to use this strategy independently.
Emotion Reading Game*	<i>Fluently reading sentences</i>	The teacher puts students in small groups and gives each group a jar with emotion words (e.g., <i>melancholic, ecstatic</i>) written on strips of paper. Students select an excerpt of text and draw a slip of paper with an emotion word and practice reading the excerpt with that emotion. Then they share their interpretation with the group and the group tries to guess which emotion the student is using. After all group members have shared, they discuss which emotion word best fits the passage.	This strategy requires that teachers create a strong classroom environment where students are willing to take risks and read in front of each other. This activity can be modified to have students select an excerpt from a piece they have just read and then students can discuss after each reading rather than at the end.
Flexible thinking protocol to teach set for variability	<i>Accurate word reading</i>	The teacher writes a multisyllabic word on the board and then reads the word incorrectly, mispronouncing one or more of the syllables. For example, the teacher may read the word <i>mischievous</i> as <i>/mis/chive/us</i> . The students then try to "flex" the sounds in a word to make the mispronounced word into a word that makes sense.	A modification is to try this instructional routine first with easier words, but without writing the words on the board so students cannot see the word.

Technique	Skills Addressed	Description	Instructional Notes or Modifications
<u>Juicy Sentences Protocol</u>	<i>Fluently reading sentences</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select a “Juicy Sentence”: Choose a sentence that is complex, is packed with meaning, and/or contains challenging vocabulary and structure. 2. Deconstruct: Break the sentence into smaller, manageable chunks (phrases, clauses). 3. Analyze Meaning: Discuss what each chunk means, asking text-dependent questions (e.g., Who is “we”? What does “ubiquitous” mean? Where/when/why does this happen?). 4. Explore Language Features: Focus on specific elements like word choice (adjectives, adverbs), grammar (clauses, pronouns, prepositions), or figurative language. 5. Reconstruct & Apply: Reassemble the sentence and have students write their own sentences using similar structures or expanding on the original, building writing skills. 	<p>This technique is best taught through modeling, then partner practice, then as individual practice.</p> <p>A modification is to teach students to select their own sentences, rather than having the teacher select the sentences.</p>
<u>Routine for teaching Latin and Greek roots and affixes</u>	<i>Accurate word reading</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher introduces the root and shares the definition. 2. Teacher shares example words and definitions for those words. 3. Students generate more words using that root or affix, with teacher support. 4. Students practice reading those words in a text and discuss the meaning of the words in context. 	<p>Introduce 1-3 roots or affixes a day. Keep instruction brief and maximize time reading texts with the roots and affixes you want to teach.</p>

Technique	Skills Addressed	Description	Instructional Notes or Modifications
Probable Passage*	<i>Accurate word reading</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teacher selects 10-12 key vocabulary words from a text and provides four categories for students. Categories for narrative passage may include characters or people, setting or place, problem or conflict, and resolution. For science texts, different categories can be used, such as data, sources, explanations, and scientific principles. 2. Students then categorize the key vocabulary prior to reading. 3. They then read the text for understanding, noticing the use of those words as they read. 4. After reading, students then revisit those words and move words to different categories as needed based on the reading. 5. Finally, students then use the categories and words to summarize the passage. 	<p>This technique works best when done orally in pairs or small groups so students have opportunities to use the words with each other.</p>
Say It Like a Character*	<i>Fluently reading sentences</i>	<p>The teacher selects a short excerpt of a longer passage that students have read, or students select an excerpt, and practice reading the excerpt the way a character would read it. The teacher selects a few students to “perform” their interpretation of the passage and the class asks the students questions, such as “why did you read it with this particular emotion?”</p>	<p>This technique requires that teachers create a strong classroom environment where students are willing to take risks and read in front of each other.</p> <p>This technique can also be completed in partners rather than the whole class to allow for all students to share their interpretations.</p>

Technique	Skills Addressed	Description	Instructional Notes or Modifications
<p>Scaffolded Partner Reading*</p>	<p><i>Accurate word reading and fluently reading sentences</i></p>	<p>In this protocol, students complete two readings of a text. The purpose of the first reading is to identify words they either don't know or can't read by underlining those words. During the first reading, the teacher circulates and notes words that multiple students have underlined. When students are finished, the teacher provides on-the-spot instruction for how to read a few of the words and what those words mean. The teacher then directs students to read the text a second time, this time for comprehension. The teacher provides a comprehension-specific purpose for reading and students read the text aloud with a partner this time.</p>	<p>This strategy requires that teachers create a strong classroom environment where students are willing to take risks and read in front of each other.</p> <p>If students are unwilling to underline words they don't know or can't read, the teacher can modify this protocol by preselecting words to teach. It is still recommended to have students do a first read for decoding, as that first read helps improve fluency, even if the students do not identify words they don't know or can't read. Over time, more resistant adolescents generally begin to trust the process and are able to underline words they have trouble reading or don't know.</p>

*For more details and examples of these techniques, see Lupo, S. M., Reynolds, D., & Hardigree, C. (2025). *Tackling tough texts: A research-based guide to scaffolding learning in grades 6-12*. Guilford.

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