



TEACH PUPILS TO USE STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING AND MONITORING THEIR READING COMPREHENSION

Reading comprehension can be improved by teaching pupils specific strategies that they can apply both to monitor and overcome barriers to comprehension.¹³ A number of different strategies exist and some overlap. These strategies are:¹⁴

- **Prediction**—pupils predict what might happen as a text is read. This causes them to pay close attention to the text, which means they can closely monitor their own comprehension.
- **Questioning**—pupils generate their own questions about a text in order to check their comprehension.
- **Clarifying**—pupils identify areas of uncertainty, which may be individual words or phrases, and seek information to clarify meaning.
- **Summarising**—pupils succinctly describe the meaning of sections of the text. This causes pupils to focus on the key content, which in turn supports comprehension monitoring. This can be attempted using graphic organisers that illustrate concepts and the relationships between them using diagrams.
- **Inference**—pupils infer the meaning of sentences from their context, and the meaning of words from spelling patterns.
- **Activating prior knowledge**—pupils think about what they already know about a topic, from reading or other experiences, and try to make links. This helps pupils to infer and elaborate, fill in missing or incomplete information and use existing mental structures to support recall.

The potential impact of these approaches is very high, but can be difficult to achieve, as they require pupils to take greater responsibility for their own learning. The strategies should be modelled and practised to ensure that they become embedded and fluent. For example, a teacher could model how they would attempt to understand a text using questioning.¹⁵ Children could then practise these skills in collaborative groups with support and feedback from their teacher decreasing as pupils become increasingly effective at using each strategy.

The strategies can be introduced individually, but pupils should also be taught how to combine strategies. The effectiveness of teaching pupils to integrate multiple strategies is well-supported by research evidence, and is likely to be more effective than relying on single strategies in isolation.¹⁶ Ultimately, the aim is for pupils themselves to take responsibility for automatically using these strategies to monitor and improve their reading comprehension.¹⁷

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

Extensive evidence from eight meta-analyses has consistently demonstrated the impact of teaching metacognitive strategies for reading comprehension. These include more studies of older pupils, but also include studies of 5-7 year old pupils.



TEACH PUPILS TO USE STRATEGIES FOR PLANNING AND MONITORING THEIR WRITING

Writing is a very challenging skill to learn and there is less evidence about the most effective ways to teach writing than there is about reading. Nevertheless, access to effective writing instruction is especially important in an era when high-stakes tests depend greatly on writing skill. Encouraging children to manage and monitor aspects of their writing is a key step. A number of different strategies are likely to help, depending on the current skills of the writer.¹⁸

- **Prewriting activities**—engaging children in activities prior to writing that help them think of and organise their ideas. This can involve tasks that encourage them to remember what they already know, find out about a topic they are not familiar with, or arrange their ideas visually (for example, by using a planning tool or graphic organiser) before writing.¹⁹
- **Drafting, revising and editing**—helping pupils to get their ideas written down as a first draft which they can then edit and revise.
- **Sharing**—instructing pupils to share, read, and edit each other's work.

Children need to be introduced to, then practise, these skills with feedback from the teacher and from their peers. The aim is for them to increase the fluency of these skills and techniques so that they become automatic. The teacher should provide appropriate initial support that is gradually reduced so the child is ultimately capable of completing the activity independently.

Pupils also need to learn about text structure, and how texts in different genres are formed. Studies show young children benefit from explicit teaching about the structure of narrative and expository texts.²⁰ Providing pupils with models of simple structures for different types of text can support this.

Modelling is also important as pupils progress from constructing simple sentences to being able to combine sentences with more complex grammatical structures. Teachers could model these processes, for example, by explicitly demonstrating how to combine several related, simple sentences to make more complex ones. Teachers should encourage pupils to do this on their own as they write.²¹

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

There is moderate evidence for the impact of teaching planning and monitoring strategies for writing from three meta-analyses, but only a few studies involved 5-7-year-old pupils.





PROMOTE FLUENT WRITTEN TRANSCRIPTION SKILLS BY ENCOURAGING EXTENSIVE AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICE AND EXPLICITLY TEACHING SPELLING

Writing is a physical task as well as an intellectual one. 'Transcription' refers to the physical skills involved in writing and the skill of spelling words correctly. Pupils must learn to form letters and spell words correctly, write in joined-up handwriting, and use a keyboard.

Accurate letter formation is an essential early skill that forms the basis of a fluent handwriting style. However, it is also important to focus on the speed of pupils' writing as well as the accuracy. Slow or effortful transcription hinders writing composition as pupils have to concentrate on monitoring their handwriting and spelling and are less able to think about the content of their writing.²²

There is no quick way to develop these essential skills other than through regular and substantial practice.

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

The evidence regarding physical writing skills is limited, and based on reviews and single studies. Fewer studies have been conducted regarding teaching transcription skills than other aspects of literacy.

Practice should be:

- **Extensive**—a large amount of regular practice is required for pupils to achieve fluency in these skills. Achieving the necessary quantity of practice requires pupils to be motivated and fully engaged in improving their writing.²³
- **Supported by effective feedback**—teachers can support children to practise effectively by providing opportunities for effective feedback.²⁴ Feedback should:
 - be specific, accurate, and clear (for example: 'It was good because you joined up your letters correctly' rather than 'Your handwriting is getting neater');
 - compare what a pupil is doing right now with what they have done wrong before (for example: 'I can see you focused on making sure you crossed your "t"s, as you remembered more often than last time');
 - encourage and support further effort;
 - be given sparingly so that it is meaningful; and
 - provide specific guidance on how to improve rather than just telling pupils when they are incorrect (for example: 'Next time, you should make sure that all of your "t"s are crossed. This is where you put the cross').

Accurate spelling is a key component of writing fluency and should be explicitly taught rather than simply tested.²⁵ However, there is limited evidence about what constitutes effective approaches to teaching spelling. Some approaches do have some evidence to support them, especially when evaluated on the basis of improvements to the spelling of individual words. It is less clear which approaches lead to better spelling in the context of pupils' composition of full texts.²⁶ The teaching of spelling is likely to work best when the spellings are related to the current content being studied in school and when teachers encourage active use of any new spellings in pupils' writing.

There is some evidence to suggest that teaching word patterns may help with spelling.²⁷ Pupils could learn about morphemes (prefixes, suffixes, and root words) and show how they recur in different words. It may be that by being able to, for example, understand that the 'un-' prefix in 'unlike' has the same spelling and meaning as in 'unusual', 'unhappy' and 'unpleasant', pupils can see that they can break words into smaller parts, many of which they already know from other words. It should be noted that an EEF-funded trial of a programme that taught Key Stage 1 pupils about morphemes did not improve their reading comprehension.²⁸ Other promising approaches include paired learning approaches and the use of techniques such as 'look-say-cover-write-say-check' (see box 2).²⁹

In the absence of better evidence regarding the teaching of spelling, teachers should be aware of the other strategies that good spellers appear to use, and consider teaching these strategies directly.³⁰ These include:

- a phonic approach—sounding out the word, and spelling it the way it sounds;
- analogy—spelling it like other known words (for example 'call' and 'fall');
- the identification of the 'tricky' parts of words so that these can be learned (such as 'separate' and 'miniature')—many of the most common words in English are 'tricky' (now known as 'common exception words' in the National Curriculum); and
- a visual approach—writing the word in two or three different ways and deciding which looks right.

BOX 2: LOOK-SAY-COVER-WRITE-SAY-CHECK

Ask the children to:

1. Look carefully at the word structure, shape, and form (or the salient orthographic, morphological, and structural features).
2. Say the word out loud. Focus on grapheme-phoneme relationships within the word. Exaggerate the pronunciation of the word to highlight correct spelling (for example, 'choc-O-late' or 'sep-AR-ate').
3. Cover the word.
4. Try to remember or picture the spelling, and write the word.
5. Say the written word out loud to check that it matches the sound and recall the structure, shape and form.
6. Uncover the word and check that the spelling is correct.





USE HIGH-QUALITY INFORMATION ABOUT PUPILS' CURRENT CAPABILITIES TO SELECT THE BEST NEXT STEPS FOR TEACHING

As pupils develop their literacy skills, teaching should respond to their changing needs. This requires teachers to collect accurate and up-to-date information (see Box 3) about pupils' current capabilities, so that they can adapt their teaching to focus on exactly what each pupil needs to progress. Teaching that adapts to pupils' needs is more efficient, because effort is focused on the best next step, and is not wasted by rehearsing skills or content that a child already knows well. This approach can be used to identify appropriate catch up support for struggling pupils, but can also be used to ensure that high attaining pupils continue to make good progress.

Once a teacher has identified a pupil's needs, teaching can be adapted by:

1. **changing the focus**—targeting an aspect of literacy where a pupil needs more support; or
2. **changing the approach**—adopting a different approach to teaching the same aspect of literacy.

BOX 3: COLLECTING HIGH QUALITY INFORMATION

A range of diagnostic tests and assessments for reading and writing are available and staff should be trained to use and interpret these effectively.³¹ The results should be used to supplement, not replace, professional judgement about a child's current capabilities.

A helpful distinction can be made between using assessment to monitor a pupil's progress, and using it to diagnose a pupil's specific capabilities and difficulties. Both are important. Monitoring can be used to identify pupils who are struggling, or whose progress can be accelerated, and diagnostic assessments can suggest the type of support they need from the teacher to continue to progress. When an assessment suggests that a child is struggling, effective diagnosis of the exact nature of their difficulty should be the first step, and should inform early and targeted intervention (see Recommendation 8).³²

Every assessment involves trade-offs, such as between the time taken to complete an assessment and its validity and reliability. Consequently, it is crucial to consider what data you hope to collect before selecting an appropriate assessment. For example, scores out of ten on a weekly spelling test may be valid for the purpose of identifying pupils most in need of extra spelling support (monitoring), but the scores alone would not be valid for the purpose of informing future teaching (diagnosis) where an analysis of the kinds of mistakes a child makes in spelling should inform specific teaching strategies.

More guidance regarding effective assessment is available in the EEF's online guide to Assessment and Monitoring Pupil Progress.³³

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

This recommendation is supported by moderate evidence from several reviews and intervention studies where an accurate baseline test is given to ensure the intervention is appropriate.

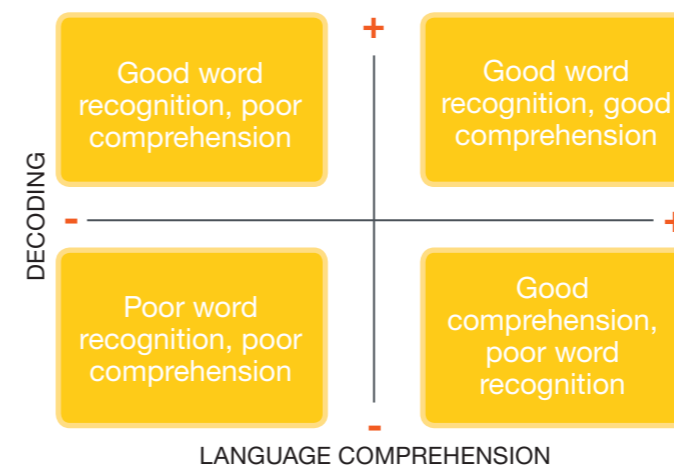
CHANGING THE FOCUS OF TEACHING

Models of typical literacy development can provide useful tools to support teachers in selecting a particular aspect of literacy to focus on. For example, the Simple View of Reading (SVR) can be used as a framework for diagnosing pupils' weaknesses in reading, and to suggest an appropriate next step for teaching.³⁴ According to the SVR, reading consists of two interacting dimensions: decoding (the ability to recognise, understand and pronounce individual words) and comprehension (the ability to understand the form and meaning of language). Proficient readers are skilled in both of these dimensions, while weaker readers may struggle with one or both of them. The four possible reading profiles are summarised in figure 2.*

The principle of using such a model to identify a pupil's relative strengths and weaknesses can be applied more broadly. A similar model of writing development distinguishes between transcription (handwriting, spelling and keyboard) skills and composition skills (composing a text that effectively suits its purpose and conveys meaning).³⁵

Ultimately, the goal is fluency in these skills and integration of all dimensions of reading and writing, but in the short term it is critical to identify need and teach accordingly.

FIGURE 2: THE SIMPLE VIEW OF READING



CHANGING THE TEACHING APPROACH

It may be that a pupil does not need more instruction on a particular aspect of their literacy, but instead they require a different approach. In this case the pupil may have become disengaged, or may be finding activities too hard or too easy. Re-engaging a pupil in their learning could require using an approach that is better suited to the pupil's interests.

Where activities are found to be too challenging then scaffolding provides a useful analogy. In construction, scaffolding provides temporary, adjustable support enabling tasks that would not otherwise be possible. In education, scaffolding is a term that is used regularly, but its meaning is often conflated with 'differentiation', 'help' and 'support'.³⁶ Scaffolding has a precise meaning: it describes how someone who is more expert (an adult or peer) can provide *structured help* when a pupil is learning a new skill. There are many different frameworks for scaffolding, but they typically share three characteristics:³⁷

- **responsiveness to need**—scaffolding requires high quality information about students' current capabilities so that support can be appropriately tailored;
- **fading of support as pupils' capabilities develop**—the rate of fading depends on the needs of the individual student and it can be done by reducing the amount and/or level of support; and
- **transfer of responsibility**—as support fades the responsibility for the skill should increasingly transfer from the teacher to the student.

A key principle of scaffolding is that one should aim to provide the minimum level of support that is needed. The level of support should gradually decrease in response to pupils becoming increasingly independent to avoid pupils failing to manage their own learning and becoming over-dependent.

*It is important to remember that the SVR is a simplified and incomplete model that does not completely describe the complex process of reading development. However, it provides a useful starting point when considering how to support pupils to improve.



USE HIGH-QUALITY STRUCTURED INTERVENTIONS TO HELP PUPILS WHO ARE STRUGGLING WITH THEIR LITERACY

Schools should focus first on developing core classroom teaching strategies that improve the literacy capabilities of the whole class. With this in place, the need for additional support should decrease. Nevertheless, it is likely that a small number of pupils will require additional support—in the form of high-quality, structured, targeted interventions—to make progress.³⁸

Identifying pupils who are struggling with their literacy is the first step (see recommendation 7). Diagnostic assessments should then be used to understand the nature of the pupil's difficulty, and match them to an appropriate intervention.

Targeted interventions involve a teacher, teaching assistant or other adult providing intensive individual or small-group support. This may take place outside of normal lessons as additional teaching, or as a replacement for other lessons. If pupils are withdrawn from normal classroom activity it is important that the alternative support is more effective than the teaching they would normally receive. If the alternative support is not more effective then it is possible for pupils to fall even further behind as children left in their class will continue to make progress. It is also important that pupils do not miss activities that they enjoy, and that a plan is in place to ensure the pupil can make links between their learning in intervention sessions and their work back in the classroom.

BOX 4: ONE-TO-ONE OR SMALL GROUP?³⁹

On average, it is a case of the smaller the group, the greater the impact: groups of two have slightly higher impact than groups of three, but slightly lower impact compared to one-to-one tuition. Some studies suggest that greater feedback from the teacher, more sustained engagement in smaller groups, or work that is more closely matched to pupils' needs explains this impact. Once group size increases above six or seven there is a noticeable reduction in effectiveness.

However, although this generally holds, there is evidence that it is not always the case. For example, in reading, small-group teaching can sometimes be more effective than either one-to-one or paired tuition. It may be that in these cases reading practice has been efficiently organised so that all the group stay fully engaged as each take their turn, such as in Guided Reading. This variability in findings suggests that the quality of the teaching in small groups may be as or more important than group size.

At present there are only a handful of catch-up programmes in the UK for which there is good evidence of effectiveness.⁴⁰ The following common elements are features of effective targeted interventions. If your school is using or considering programmes that have not been rigorously evaluated, you should ensure that they include these features:⁴¹

- brief (about 30 minutes) and regular (3–5 times per week) sessions that are maintained over a sustained period (6–12 weeks) and carefully timetabled to enable consistent delivery;
- extensive training (5–30 hours) from experienced trainers and/or teachers;
- structured supporting resources and/or lesson plans with clear objectives;
- assessments to identify appropriate pupils, guide areas for focus, and track pupil progress—effective interventions ensure the right support is being provided to the right child;
- tuition that is additional to, and explicitly linked with, normal lessons;
- makes connections between the out-of-class (intervention) learning and classroom teaching.

BOX 5: WHO SHOULD DELIVER CATCH-UP INTERVENTIONS?

The evidence suggests that interventions delivered by Teaching Assistants (TAs) can have a positive impact on attainment, but on average this impact is lower than when delivered by a teacher.⁴² Crucially, these positive effects only occur when TAs work in structured settings with high-quality support and training. When TAs are deployed in more informal, unsupported instructional roles, they can impact negatively on pupils' learning outcomes. In other words, what matters most is not whether TAs are delivering interventions, but how they are doing so. In this context, structured evidence-based programmes provide an excellent means of aiding high-quality delivery.

The EEF's Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants guidance report provides more guidance about the deployment of TAs.⁴³

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

There is extensive and consistent evidence from at least six meta-analyses and reviews, including studies involving pupils aged 5–7, of the impact of structured interventions and intensive one-to-one support.

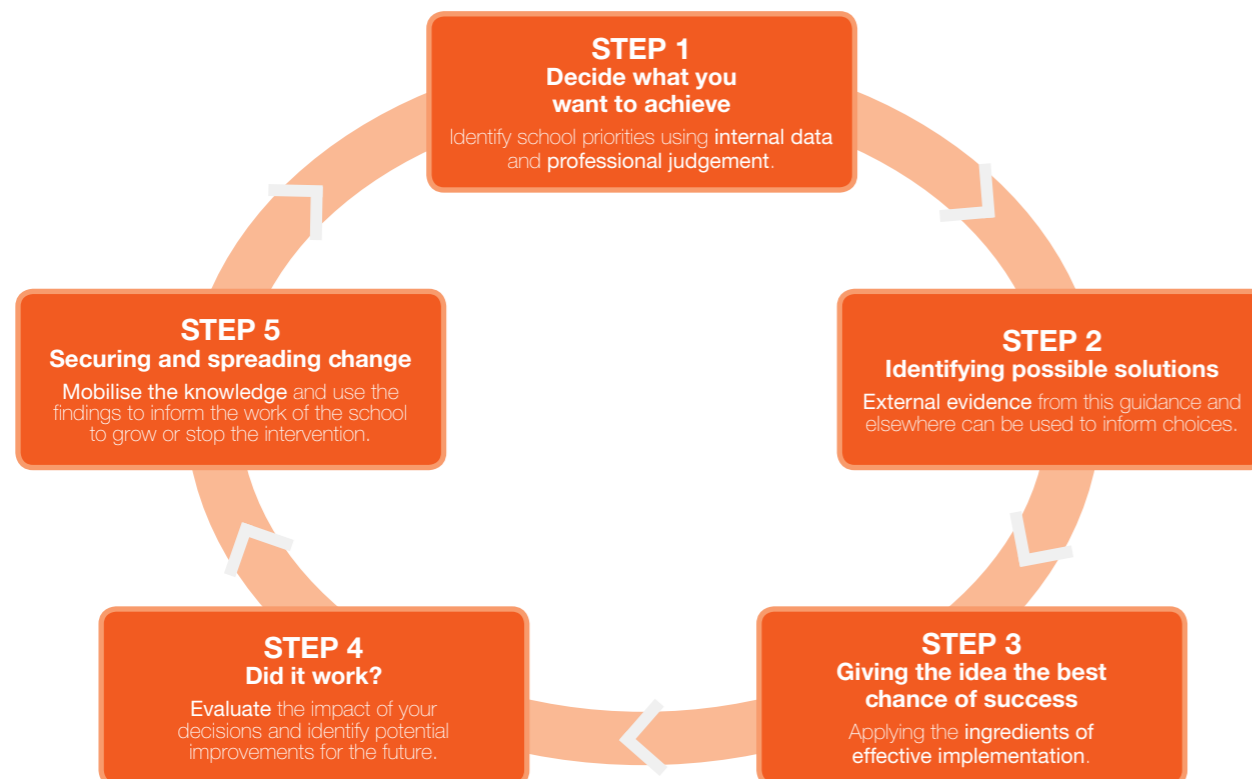
ACTING ON THE EVIDENCE

There are several key principles to consider when acting on this guidance.

1. These recommendations do not provide a 'one size fits all' solution. It is important to consider the delicate balance between implementing the recommendations faithfully and applying them appropriately to your school's particular context. Implementing the recommendations effectively will require careful consideration of how they fit your school's context and the application of sound professional judgement.
2. The recommendations should be considered together, as a group, and should not be implemented selectively. For example, although there is very extensive evidence for teaching reading comprehension strategies (recommendation 3), this is just one part of a broad and balanced approach to teaching reading (recommendation 2).
3. It is important to consider the precise detail provided beneath the headline recommendations. For example, schools should not use recommendation 7 to justify the purchase of lots of interventions. Rather, it should provoke thought about the most appropriate interventions to buy.

Inevitably, change takes time, and we recommend taking at least two terms to plan, develop, and pilot strategies on a small scale before rolling out new practices across the school. Gather support for change across the school and set aside regular time throughout the year to focus on this project and review progress.

FIGURE 3. AN EVIDENCE-INFORMED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT CYCLE



HOW WAS THIS GUIDANCE COMPILED?

This guidance report draws on the best available evidence regarding the teaching of literacy to primary-aged pupils. The primary source of evidence for the recommendations is the Teaching and Learning Toolkit, which is a synthesis of international research evidence developed by Professor Steve Higgins and colleagues at the University of Durham with the support of the Sutton Trust and the EEF. However, the report also draws on a wide range of evidence from other studies and reviews regarding literacy development and teaching. The emphasis is on rigorous evaluations that provide reliable evidence of an impact on pupil learning outcomes. The intention is to provide a reliable foundation of what is effective, based on robust evidence.

The report was developed over several stages. The initial stage produced a scoping document that set out the headline recommendations and supporting evidence. This was subjected to an academic peer review. The feedback from this review informed the writing of a final draft of the report which was then subjected to a second external review by a group of academics, practitioners, and other stakeholders.

An evidence rating which represents the authors' judgement regarding the strength of the evidence base is provided for each recommendation. The authors considered three features of the evidence when creating the ratings:

1. **quality and quantity**—recommendations that were based on a large number of high-quality studies such as meta-analyses or randomised controlled trials received higher ratings;
2. **consistency**—recommendations that were based on relatively consistent evidence received higher ratings; and
3. **relevance**—recommendations based on evidence that directly related to pupils aged 7–11 received stronger ratings.

We would like to thank the many researchers and practitioners who provided support and feedback in producing this guidance. We would like to give particular thanks to Professors Roger Beard, Greg Brooks, Charles Hulme, Christine Merrell, Kathy Silva, Robert Slavin and Maggie Snowling.



GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY CONTINUED

Analytic phonics	Analytic phonics involves the analysis of whole words to detect sound or spelling patterns, then splitting them into smaller parts and sounding these out to help with the decoding process. For a word like 'thrill', in analytic phonics one would encourage the break as onset and rime 'thr – ill' and get the child to sound this out (thruh – ill). One might also encourage a pupil to identify other words they know which start with this sound such as 'three, throw, threw.'
Diagnostic assessment	An assessment that aims to identify a pupil's current strengths and weaknesses so as to determine the most helpful teaching strategies and content to move the pupil forwards. It can be distinguished from tracking or monitoring where the aim is just to check progress. Diagnostic assessment aims to make teaching more efficient.
Decoding skills	The ability to translate written words into the sounds of spoken language.
Etymology	The study of the origins and history of words and the way in which their meanings have changed. The etymology of 'phonics', for example, is from the Greek phone meaning voice. It was originally used in the 17th Century to mean the science of sound, but has now come to mean an approach to teaching reading.
Expository text	A non-fiction text that aims to inform a reader about a specific topic.
Expressive vocabulary	The words that a pupil can express through speaking or writing.
Grapheme	A letter or combination of letters used to represent a phoneme, for example, in the word 'push', the graphemes <p>, <u>, <sh> represent the phonemes /p/ u/ /ʃ/ to make the word 'push' and phonetically /puʃ/.
Inference	Using information from a text in order to arrive at another piece of information that is implicit.
Meta-analysis	A particular type of systematic research review which focuses on the quantitative evidence from different studies and combines these statistically to seek a more reliable or more robust conclusion than can be drawn from separate studies.
Morphemes	The smallest units of words that contain meaning, such as the 'root' word 'child' and the affix '-ish', which in combination make a new word 'childish'.
Morphology	The form and meaning of a language; the study of the smallest units of words that contain meaning.
Onset-rime	The onset of a word is the part of a syllable that precedes the vowel of the syllable. The rime is the final part of a word, including the vowel and the other phonemes that follow it.
Orthography	The rules for writing a language, including spelling, punctuation and capitalisation.

Phoneme	A phoneme is a speech sound. It is the smallest unit of spoken language that distinguishes one word (or word part) from another. For example, 't' and 'p' in tip and dip. Phonemes are represented with a range of symbols as most letters can be pronounced in different ways.
Phonemic awareness	The ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words, and the understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds. Phonemic awareness involves hearing language at the phoneme level.
Phonics	An approach to teaching reading that focuses on the sounds represented by letters in words (see also 'analytic' and 'synthetic' phonics).
Reading comprehension	The ability to understand the meaning of a text.
Receptive vocabulary	The words that can be understood by a person when they are reading or listening.
Reliable assessments	Assessments which are consistent and would produce the same results when repeated. If two teachers give different marks for a piece of writing, then their assessment is not reliable.
Segmentation	The separation of words into parts, usually into phonemes or morphemes.
Semantics	The part of language (or linguistics) and logic concerned with meaning.
Syntax	The rules and principles for how words are combined and organised into phrases and sentences.
Synthetic phonics	A form of phonics teaching in which sounding-out is used. It teaches children to recognise phonemes discretely and match them to their graphemes, and then the skill of blending the phonemes together into words. The classic example is 'kuh – a – tuh' – 'cat'.
Systematic phonics	The teaching of letter-sound relationships in an explicit, organised and sequenced fashion, as opposed to incidentally or on a 'when-needed' basis. May refer to systematic synthetic or systematic analytic phonics.
Valid assessments	Valid assessments measure what the assessment is supposed to measure.

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