

Key Components of LETRS-Based Reading Instruction

Overview of LETRS

The primary purpose of LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) is to improve literacy instruction by equipping teachers with evidence-based practices rooted in scientific research. It is grounded in research on how children learn to read and write, ensuring that instructional methods are based on proven strategies that promote literacy development.

LETRS aligns closely with "the science of reading," which refers to the body of research that examines how individuals learn to read and the most effective instructional methods based on research findings. If teachers implement LETRS or similar models that draw from the same core of research in literacy instruction, they are following *The Science of Reading*.

The reading skills addressed by LETRS, plus guidance for instruction, are as follows.

1. Phonemic Awareness

Description

The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.

Instructional Guidance

- Instruction should be explicit and systematic
- Focus on 1–2 phonemes at a time
- Use a “continuum of complexity” from simplest to most challenging sounds

Subskills

- Phoneme isolation: Identifying individual sounds in words.
- Phoneme blending: Combining individual sounds to form words.
- Phoneme segmentation: Breaking words into individual sounds.
- Phoneme manipulation: Changing phonemes to create new words.

Strategies

- Elkonin Boxes: Using visual aids to segment words into individual sounds.
- Phoneme Isolation: Practice isolating the first, middle, and last sounds in words.
- Blending Games: Activities that require students to blend sounds to form words.

Sample Collaborative Learning Activity

Sound Circle: Students sit in a circle and take turns identifying and manipulating phonemes in words shared by the group. This can be turned into a game where students earn points for correct responses.

Phoneme Relay: Divide students into teams. Each team lines up. The first student in line is given a word card. They must say the word and isolate a specific phoneme. Then, they pass the card and task to the next teammate.

Phonemic Awareness Charades: Students act out a word silently using gestures and facial expressions. Other students guess the word and identify the phonemes within it.

2. Phonics

Description

Understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds and how they are used to read and write.

Instructional Guidance

- Instruction should be explicit and systematic
- Focus on 1–2 letter–sound associations at a time
- Use a “continuum of complexity” from simplest to most challenging associations
- Combine instruction with application

Subskills

- Letter-sound correspondence: Knowing the relationship between letters and their sounds.
- Decoding: Using letter-sound knowledge to read words.
- Encoding: Applying letter-sound knowledge to spell words.
- Sight word recognition: Quickly identifying common words by sight.

Strategies

- Explicit Instruction: Direct teaching of letter-sound relationships.
- Decodable Texts: Reading materials that align with the phonics patterns being taught.
- Word Sorts: Categorizing words based on common phonics patterns.

Sample Collaborative Learning Activity

Phonics Pairs: Pair students together to practice phonics skills. One student can read aloud while the other checks for correct phoneme pronunciation and gives feedback. They can switch roles to ensure active participation.

Word Building Race: Provide letter tiles or cards to each group. Teams race against each other to build as many words as possible using given phonics patterns. They must read aloud each word they create.

Phonics Puzzles: Give each group a set of word puzzles where they must match words with corresponding pictures or definitions. Each puzzle focuses on a different phonics pattern.

Phonics Bingo: Create bingo cards with words or pictures that contain specific phonics patterns. Students take turns calling out words or sounds related to the patterns until someone gets bingo.

3. Fluency

Description

The ability to read with appropriate speed, accuracy, and proper expression.

Instructional Guidance

- Focus on small-group participation
- Use high-interest texts
- Include feedback, correction, and repetition until mastery

Subskills

- Accuracy: Reading words correctly and fluently.
- Rate: Reading at an appropriate speed.
- Expression: Reading with appropriate intonation and phrasing.
- Pacing: Adjusting reading speed based on text difficulty.

Strategies

- Repeated Reading: Practicing reading the same text multiple times to build speed and accuracy.
- Paired Reading: Reading aloud with a partner to model fluent reading.
- Collaborative Practice: Reading in unison with a group to build confidence and fluency.

Sample Collaborative Activity (in addition to the activities above)

Reader's Theater: Students work in groups to practice and perform scripts. This activity promotes repeated reading in a fun, engaging way and helps students improve their reading fluency through collaboration and practice.

Fluency Coach (a form of Guided Oral Reading): Pair students with different reading abilities. One student reads aloud while the other provides feedback on accuracy, rate, and expression. They switch roles after each passage.

Choral Reading: Students read a passage together as a group, focusing on synchronizing their reading speed and expression. They repeat the passage until they achieve fluency.

4. Vocabulary

Description

The knowledge of words and their meanings.

Instructional Guidance

- Increase students' exposure to new words and practice words
- Provide both direct (learn words) and incidental instruction (learn to understand new words)
- Require students to use new words repeatedly
- Link instruction to real-world texts and oral usage

Subskills

- Word meaning: Understanding the meanings of words.
- Context clues: Using surrounding text to infer word meanings.
- Word relationships: Understanding synonyms, antonyms, and word families.
- Academic vocabulary: Learning subject-specific or technical terms.

Strategies

- Explicit Vocabulary Instruction: Direct teaching of specific words and their meanings.
- Semantic Mapping: Creating visual maps that show the relationships between words and concepts.
- Context Clues: Teaching students to use surrounding text to infer the meaning of unknown words.

Sample Collaborative Learning Activity

Vocabulary Jigsaw: Divide students into small groups and assign each group a set of vocabulary words. Each group researches and learns their words, then reassembles into new groups where each student teaches their vocabulary words to their peers.

Vocabulary Charades: Students act out vocabulary words without speaking while their peers guess the word based on their gestures. They then discuss the meaning and usage of the word.

Vocabulary Auction: Assign each group a set of vocabulary words. Groups create advertisements or presentations to "sell" their words to the class, explaining definitions and providing examples.

Vocabulary Storytelling: In small groups, students collaborate to create a story using a list of assigned vocabulary words. Each student contributes sentences using the vocabulary words.

5. Comprehension

Description

The ability to understand and interpret what is being read.

Instructional Guidance

- Build and draw from students' background knowledge
- Require student work, products, and multiple tools for interpretation
- Facilitate collaboration, particularly discussion
- Support differing but justifiable interpretations

Subskills

- Literal comprehension: Understanding explicitly stated information in the text.
- Inferential comprehension: Making logical deductions and inferences based on the text.
- Evaluative comprehension: Critically analyzing and evaluating the text.
- Summarization: Condensing the main ideas of the text into concise statements.

Strategies

- Questioning Techniques: Using questions before, during, and after reading to engage students.
- Summarization: Teaching students to summarize what they have read to ensure understanding.
- Graphic Organizers: Using visual aids to organize information and ideas from the text.

Sample Collaborative Learning Activity

Literature Circles: Students are divided into small groups, and each member is assigned a role (e.g., summarizer, questioner, connector). They read a text and discuss it in their roles, helping each other understand and interpret the material.

Reciprocal Teaching: In pairs, students take turns leading discussions about a text they have read together. They predict, summarize, clarify, and question each other about the content.

Graphic Organizers Collaboration: Students work in pairs or small groups to create graphic organizers (e.g., concept maps, Venn diagrams) that summarize and organize information from a text or topic.

References

- <https://www.voyagersopris.com/letrs/overview>
<https://www.readingrockets.org/article/comprehension>