

Explicit, Systematic, and Sequential Reading Instruction:

Effective, research-based instructional strategies to support students in reading.

Read the Full Article Here: <https://www.modelteaching.com/education-articles/reading-ela-instruction/explicit-systematic-and-sequential-reading-instruction>

How should you structure your reading instruction?

A strong reading classroom should include specific instructional time that utilizes explicit, systematic, and sequential instruction as part of your well-rounded reading instruction. Let's delve into each of these instructional components:

Explicit Reading Instruction

Explicit reading instruction means directly teaching your students a reading skill or strategy in a clear and straightforward way. It involves modeling the skill, explaining it step-by-step, and providing plenty of guided practice before asking students to try it on their own.

A 2022 article by Vaught and Fletcher (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9004595/>) describes explicit instruction and provides some guidance on the effective teaching strategies that improve reading, including segmenting skills into smaller tasks, modeling instruction, and providing specific feedback to students. It highlights explicit reading instruction as the “essential tool” that is shown to improve reading skills in students. But explicit reading instruction can contain components of systematic and sequential reading as well, and these combinations are known to improve reading.

Systematic Reading Instruction

Systematic reading instruction is a structured, organized approach to teaching reading skills in a logical, step-by-step progression. It involves starting with more basic skills first, and moving students toward more complex concepts and skills in a logical order.

Sequential reading Instruction

Sequential reading instruction focuses on teaching skills in a specific order, aligned with how children naturally develop their reading abilities. While systematic instruction emphasizes logical connections between skills and focuses on the process of teaching skills in a clear and specific way, sequential instruction is about introducing those skills at the right time for your students' developmental stage, and in the right order.

Working Together

When explicit, systematic, and sequential instruction work together it is known as **structured literacy**, a clear and effective method for improving reading progress in students. Structured literacy is considered a research-backed method for helping students read, and in fact, is also effective in supporting students with reading disorders, like children with dyslexia. Combining a structured literacy approach with concepts that progress in a sequential and developmentally appropriate manner for your students can produce strong gains in content mastery, reading fluency, and the progression of many other reading behaviors and skills.

What does structured literacy look like in a classroom?

Read this classroom scenario to get an idea of how each component of reading instruction works together in a class.

Ms. Clark is beginning a classroom unit on long vowel patterns with the silent e. Her goal is to ensure that when students encounter these words, they are able to differentiate sounds in words that contain the silent e, compared with the short vowel sounds they have previously learned. She guided her 2nd-grade students through a step-by-step word study lesson. She reviewed previously learned short vowel sounds, writing example words like log, mat, and sun on the board. Then, she introduced long vowel patterns with silent e. First, she modeled how to sound out the words. Then, students practiced reading and spelling words like cake, kite, and lime using dry-erase boards. Afterward, they completed a worksheet, matching pictures to the correct words, and ended the lesson by reading a short story featuring long vowel words, discussing how the new patterns helped them decode the text.

Let's review how each type of instruction worked together in this lesson.

Explicit Instruction: The teacher taught and modeled the concepts to students before they tried them on their own.

Systematic Instruction: Students had a clearly ordered lesson to follow, aligned with a clear learning goal and specific steps to master skills.

Sequential Instruction: Students worked on a developmentally appropriate skill that naturally connected to a prior, simpler concept.

When lessons to teach new concepts are structured in this way, students are able to progress and master new concepts more quickly compared with other methods.

But, what concepts should be taught in this way to support reading instruction?

Effective reading instruction will generally support five components of reading:

Phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate sounds with words, and must be explicitly taught and demonstrated to students.

For Phonics and Word Recognition

Phonics is a method of teaching that develops a student's ability to recognize the sounds that letters and letter combinations make.

Fluency

Fluency is the ability of a student to read words accurately, at an appropriate pace, and with the correct expression.

Vocabulary

In order for students to move forward in comprehending the text, a strong vocabulary is required. Vocabulary can be explicitly taught to students, but it can also be taught via context clues and with greater exposure to a variety of texts at many levels.

For Text Comprehension

Comprehension is the ability of a student to understand what he or she is reading. Without the ability to decode words (through phonemic awareness and the phonics instruction you provide to your students), students will not be able to read fluently.

You can read more about the five components of reading in the Model Teaching blog here: <https://www.modelteaching.com/education-articles/reading-ela-instruction/the-big-five-within-the-science-of-reading>

Unfortunately, though these five components are well-known to be a requirement of a strong reading program, a 2023 report by the National Council on Teacher Quality found that only 25% of reading programs address all five components. ([Teacher Prep Review: Strengthening Elementary Reading Instruction - National Council on Teacher Quality](#)) So, as you review your lessons throughout the year, ask yourself whether you have created

adequate learning opportunities for students to interact with instructional strategies addressing all five components of reading.

What the five components of reading and explicit, systematic, and sequential instruction mean for your classroom

Your reading classroom is likely filled with many different activities, stations, and lessons built to support your students. You probably plan time for your students to read with support, independently, or listen as you read. You probably structure lesson activities designed around phonics instruction or to improve fluency. You likely know that addressing and teaching each of the five components of reading is necessary for student success, and you design plans in your lesson sequence to support all areas of reading in your classroom. As you design your lessons and build activities for support, ask yourself whether your lessons are developmentally appropriate. Ask yourself: Am I modeling skills and allowing time for my students to practice them? Have I designed a lesson structure that is broken down into manageable components for student mastery? Am I clearly sequencing my lesson activities and providing appropriate support for my students with learner differences? As you work to address the main components of reading in your classroom, taking the time to ensure that your lessons focus on explicit, systematic, and sequential instruction will ensure you set your students up for the best chances of reading success.

For further reading:

Read the report to learn more about how to improve elementary reading instruction:

[Teacher Prep Review: Strengthening Elementary Reading Instruction - National Council on Teacher Quality](#)

Learn specifics of instruction using structure literacy by reviewing these guidelines from the International Dyslexia Association: <https://dyslexiaida.org/structured-literacy-effective-instruction-for-students-with-dyslexia-and-related-reading-difficulties/>

Reference this U.S. Department of Education Funded review of the five components of reading, with specific information and ideas on how to teach each one:

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED512569.pdf>