CURRICULUM EVALUATION GUIDELINES

Use these guidelines to evaluate how well a curriculum aligns with the findings from the science of reading.

K-5 English Language Arts (ELA)

Important Preliminary Statements

Unlike learning to speak and understand language, learning to read and write is not naturally acquired (Lyon, 1998). However, the vast majority of students can learn to read and write when provided with effective instruction. These guidelines have been developed to assist educators and decision-makers in selecting curricula and instructional materials that support maximally effective instruction.
The foundation of effective instruction in word recognition is built upon explicitly, systematically, cumulatively, and diagnostically teaching how letters represent the sounds within spoken words, how letters are used to sound out printed words, and how to read words accurately, automatically, and fluently so that comprehension takes place and reading development can proceed beyond the basic level.
Reading ability must develop so that students can comprehend at increasing levels of sophistication—the whole point of reading. Thus, curricula must not emphasize foundational word recognition skills to the exclusion or near-exclusion of language development (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, discourse) and the building of background knowledge. Curricula should emphasize developing these key aspects of language comprehension orally, at first, while foundational reading skills are being developed, then continue to develop these elements through independent reading once students are able to read fluently.
As is true of all complex human behaviors, some students will require additional instruction in building foundational skills while others will require much less. Almost all will require some. Instruction should be adjusted based on proper assessment, providing more intensive skills instruction to those whose scores indicate they are exhibiting difficulties in developing foundational skills.
If 85% of students are not achieving proficiency in foundational skills with a Tier 1 curriculum as measured with a reliable and valid curriculum based measure, the first assumption should be that something vital is lacking in the program or its implementation, not the students.

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What is the Science of Reading?

The science of reading is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. This research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages. The science of reading has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some have difficulty; and how we can most effectively assess and teach and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties.

For more information, visit https://www.thereadingleague.org/what-is-the-science-of-reading/ to download the Defining Guide.

What the Science of Reading Discovered About How Skillful Reading Develops

To understand how a student develops into a skillful reader (i.e., a fluent reader who can comprehend text), we look toward two theoretical frameworks aligned with science. We encourage all stakeholders to familiarize themselves with these frameworks as they should be used to inform reading assessment and instruction.

The Simple View of Reading has been empirically validated by over 150 scientific studies. It shows us that reading comprehension is not the sum, but the product of two components - word recognition and language comprehension - such that if either one is weak, reading comprehension is diminished.

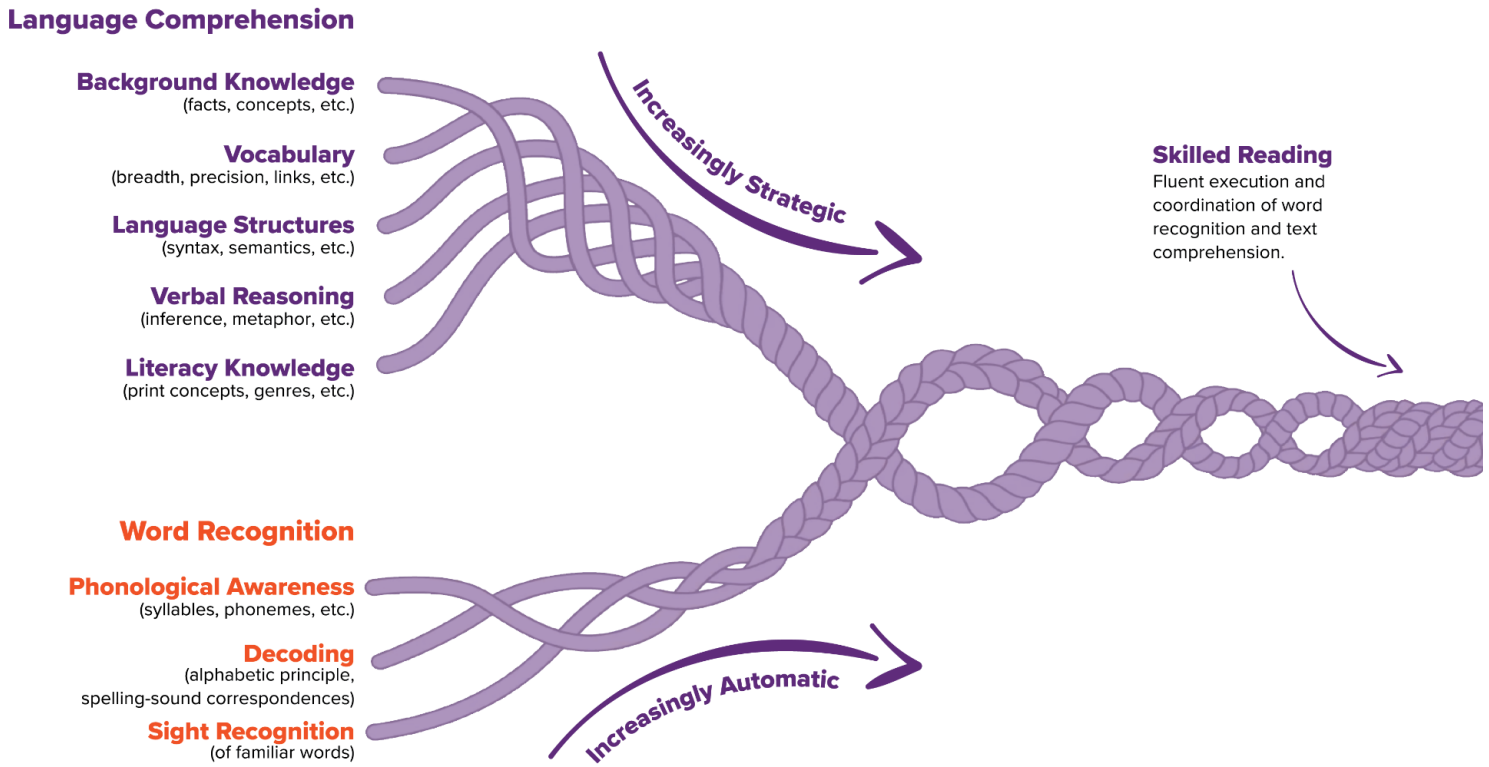


For a more in-depth understanding of the subcomponents within word recognition (WR) and language comprehension (LC), we turn next to Scarborough's Reading Rope.

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The Reading Rope is a visual metaphor for the development of skills over time (Scarborough, 2001). It breaks out the subcomponents of word recognition and language comprehension to expose their development as they intertwine and become increasingly strategic and automatic over time to develop fluent, skilled reading.

The Simple View of Reading and the Reading Rope are helpful to understand and refer to as you evaluate Tier 1 curricula, aligned intervention materials, and your suite of assessments.



Red Flags

Research findings from the science of reading have revealed approaches to teaching reading that are less effective and could impair the acquisition of skilled reading for many students. These approaches are labeled in this document as **Red Flags.**

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IMPORTANT: Read Directions Before You Begin

1. Assemble a review team that has a base of knowledge in the science of reading. It is important to include school and district leaders, educators, special educators, and specialists who have been trained in the science of reading and who understand the terms within each section's glossaries.

2. Gather and familiarize yourself with the materials to be evaluated: the curriculum materials including their scopes and sequences and several lessons from the targeted grade(s). For the final section of this evaluation, the review team will need to have your school or Local Education Agency's (LEA) suite of assessments on hand.

3. Note that the structure of these guidelines aligns with Scarborough's Reading Rope; there are sections for the subcomponents of word recognition followed by subcomponents of language comprehension. There is a third section to review components of reading comprehension, a fourth section to review writing, and a fifth section to review assessment materials.

4. When reviewing curricula, it is very important to prioritize looking for **Red Flags, which are practices *not* aligned with the science of reading.** Progress through each section, one at a time, searching for red flags that will alert you that *nonaligned* practices are present in the program. If the curriculum you are evaluating features a Red Flag, place an X in the adjacent red box.
    a. **If a red flag box is checked (including in the non-negotiables section), use the notes section to note how educators will use/build their knowledge and use supplemental materials to ensure this non-aligned practice will not be included in instruction.**
    b. If many/most red boxes are checked in a section, it is likely that the program is not aligned with the findings from the science of reading. Keep searching rather than try to supplement such a program!

5. (OPTIONAL) When you finish reviewing a program for Red Flags and decide there are not enough nonaligned, "red flagged" components to remove it from consideration, you can opt to continue reviewing it for instructional practices that *are* evidence-aligned.
    a. These elements can be thought of as "wish lists." There is no perfect curriculum, so a program should not be rejected if it doesn't have every possible evidence-aligned practice (including those in the non-negotiables section). Instead, **for any missing practices, use the notes section to address how educators will use/build their knowledge and use supplemental materials in that area.**
    b. If many/most of the evidence-aligned practices are included, it is likely to be aligned with the science of reading, but remember, the primary decision-making mechanism for selecting a curriculum using these guidelines is the absence of Red Flags.

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At the end of these guidelines, you will find sources to support the practices that are categorized as either aligned or not aligned with the science of reading. The numbers to the left of the “red flags” and the “aligned practices" assist you in finding the corresponding source(s) in the References section at the end of the guidelines.

The Reading League recommends using the companion Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines Reviewer Workbook, linked on The Reading League website, Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines landing page. This workbook includes a review gradient for teams wishing to capture a finer grain picture of the extent to which a red flag statement is true or untrue for a given curriculum. The workbook also includes areas for teams to capture notes and specific information during their review.

IMPORTANT:

Evidence aligned materials are an essential component of successful literacy instruction; however, a system will not produce results with a program alone. It is also important to build curriculum-agnostic educator and leader knowledge in the science of reading and to develop a coaching system to support implementation. For the greatest positive impact, it is also essential to ensure practices are aligned across all systems (e.g., grade levels, tiers of instruction across a Multi-Tiered System of Supports).

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Section 1: WORD RECOGNITION

NON-NEGOTIABLES: WORD RECOGNITION

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
1.1	Three cueing-systems are taught as strategies for decoding in early grades (i.e., directing students to use picture cues, context cues, or attend to the first letter of a word as a cue).	
1.2	Guidance to memorize any whole words, including high frequency words, by sight without attending to the sound/symbol correspondences.	
1.3	Supporting materials do not provide a systematic scope and sequence nor opportunities for practice and review of elements taught (e.g., phonics, decoding, encoding).	
	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading	
1.4	Explicit instruction of phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling	
1.5	Systematic scope and sequence of skills building from simple to complex.	
1.6	Curriculum and support materials that provide opportunities for practice and interleaving of elements taught (e.g., phonics, decoding, encoding).	

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WORD RECOGNITION

Phonological and Phoneme Awareness

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
1.7	Instruction only attends to larger units of phonological awareness (syllables, rhyme, onset-rime) without moving to the phoneme level (e.g., blends such as /t/ /r/ are kept intact rather than having students notice their individual sounds).	
1.8	Instruction is focused on letters only without explicit instruction and practice with the phonemes that letters represent.	
1.9	Phoneme awareness is not taught as a foundational reading skill.	
1.10	Phonological and phoneme awareness are not assessed and monitored.	
	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading	
1.11	Instruction includes larger units of phonological awareness (syllable, rhyme, onset-rime) in Pre-K and beginning of K (Note: instruction should progress to the phoneme level as soon as possible).	
1.12	Phoneme awareness is taught directly, explicitly, and systematically.	
1.13	Instruction includes conversations about the way sounds are made in the mouth (i.e., how the articulatory gestures of air flow, tongue and lip placement, vocal cord voicing are happening)	
1.14	Instructional focus on attuning students to all phonemes in words (e.g., first, final, medial, phonemes in blends).	

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Glossary

Explicit Instruction: Instruction that is taught directly and clearly, leaving little to chance. Teachers begin by modeling the objective, ensuring that students know what is expected. Students then practice along with the teacher, and finally, they complete the task individually (e.g., I do, we do, you do). Explicit instruction includes practice with immediate corrective feedback.

Grapheme: A letter or letter combination that spells a phoneme; it can be one, two, three, or four letters in English (e.g., i, ou, igh, ough).

Phoneme: The smallest unit of sound in a spoken word; an individual speech sound.Phoneme Awareness: The ability to notice, think about, or manipulate the individual phonemes (sounds) in spoken words. It is the highest level of phonological awareness and a potent predictor of future reading success.

Phonological Awareness: One's sensitivity to, or explicit awareness of, the phonological structure of words in one's language. It is an "umbrella" term that encompasses awareness of individual words in spoken sentences, syllables, onset-rime segments, and individual phonemes.

Systematic Instruction: The use of a planned, logical sequence to introduce elements taught, building from the simplest to those that are more complex.

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Phonics and Phonic Decoding

Note: Decoding and Encoding are reciprocal processes and should be taught as such. This section includes similar components to the spelling components in Section 4. Reviewing these sections together may take less time than reviewing them separately.

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
1.15	Letter-sound correspondences are taught opportunistically or implicitly during text reading.	
1.16	Instruction is typically "one and done;" phonics skills are introduced but with very little or short-term review.	
1.17	Key words for letter/sound correspondences are not aligned with the pure phoneme being taught (e.g., earth for /ĕ/, ant for /ă/, orange for /ŏ/).	
1.18	Phonics instruction takes place in short (or optional) "mini-lessons" or "word work" sessions.	
1.19	The initial instructional sequence introduces many (or all) consonants before a vowel is introduced, short vowels are all taught in rapid succession and/or all sounds for one letter are taught all at once.	
1.20	Blending is not explicitly taught nor practiced.	
1.21	Instruction encourages students to memorize whole words, read using the first letter only as a clue, guess at words in context using a "what would make sense?" strategy, or use picture clues rather than phonic decoding.	
1.22	Words with known sound-symbol correspondences, including high frequency words, are taught as whole-word units, often as stand-alone "sight words" to be memorized.	
1.23	Few opportunities for word-level decoding practice are provided.	
1.24	Early texts are predominantly predictable and/or leveled texts which include phonic elements that have not been taught; decodable texts are not used or emphasized.	

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1.25	Advanced word study (Grades 2-5) Instruction in phonics ends once single syllable phonics patterns (e.g., CVC, CVCe) are taught.	
1.26	Advanced word study (Grades 2-5) No instruction in multisyllabic word decoding strategies and/or using morphology to support word recognition is evident.	
Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading		
1.27	Letter-sound correspondences are taught to automaticity in an explicit manner.	
1.28	Phonics instruction includes cumulative review including application in reading and writing.	
1.29	Phonics instruction is systematic and sequential, building from simple letter-sound correspondences to complex phonic patterns (i.e., instruction begins with short vowels and consonants).	
1.30	Segmenting and blending are taught explicitly and practiced regularly, in both decoding and encoding.	
1.31	Explicit instruction directs students' attention to the structure of the word; the emphasis is on phonic decoding.	
1.32	Irregular high-frequency words are taught by drawing attention to both regular and irregular sounds once sound-spellings have been taught.	
1.33	Opportunities to practice decoding regular and irregular words in isolation are provided	
1.34	Instruction includes spaced practice and interleaving of skills taught (e.g., practicing old and new phonics patterns in one activity, practicing a learned phonics pattern in reading *and* spelling).	
1.35	Phonics skills are practiced by applying letter-sound knowledge in decodable texts that match the phonics elements taught, securing phonic decoding.	
1.36	Advanced Word Study (Grades 2 and above): Instruction begins with basic letter-sound correspondences followed by increasingly more complex patterns such as syllable types, morphemes, and etymological influences (i.e., word origins).	

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1.37	Advanced Word Study (Grades 2 and above): Includes more advanced phonics skills (e.g., second sounds of c/g, digraphs, variant vowels).
1.38	For Multilingual Learners, once they decode the word accurately, supports (e.g., descriptions, pictures, or gestures) are used to teach or confirm the meaning of the decoded word(s).
1.39	For Multilingual Learners, attention is paid to positive transfer of letters and sounds from their home language in addition to explicit attention to those not present in their home language.

Glossary

Blending: Putting phonemes together to form a word.
Encoding: Understanding the spelling of words; a skill that develops reciprocally to decoding when explicitly taught.
Etymology: The history of a word or word part that includes its origin.
High-Frequency Words: Words that appear most frequently in printed text.
Interleaving: Practice that is spaced out over time, consisting of two or more subjects or skills related to an instructional target within the same practice task.
Morpheme: The smallest unit of a word that carries meaning (e.g., prefix, suffix, base element)
Phonics: Instruction to teach how print/letters represent the sounds of spoken language.
Phonic Decoding: The process of sounding out words using letter-sound knowledge and blending those sounds together to pronounce the word. In the research literature, this process is referred to as phonological recoding or simply recoding.
Segmenting: Breaking a spoken word into its individual phonemes.
Syllable Types: The six common syllable patterns in English: closed, open, vowel-consonant-e, r-controlled, vowel team, and consonant-le.
Sound-Symbol Correspondences: The relationship between a grapheme, or printed letter(s), and its corresponding phoneme, or individual speech sound (i.e., <c> can correspond to the phoneme /k/ or /s/).
Spaced Practice: Practice that occurs over time.
Types of Text:

- *Decodable*: Texts with a high proportion of phonetically regular words matched to common letter-sound relationships previously taught in phonics lessons within accompanying teacher guides.
- *Leveled*: Texts leveled according to a gradient of difficulty based on multiple supportive features of the whole *text*, which allow for an emphasis on meaning, such as text structure, themes and ideas, or language and literary features.
- *Predictable*: Texts with predictable text structures such as repetitive and predictable sentences, words, and phrases.

Variant Vowels: Groups of letters that produce the same vowel sound (e.g., ai, ay, eigh).

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Fluency

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
1.40	Fluency instruction focuses primarily on student silent reading.	
1.41	Rate is emphasized over accuracy; priority is given to the student's ability to read words quickly.	
1.42	Word-level fluency practice to automaticity is not provided, or fluency is viewed only as text-reading fluency.	
1.43	Fluency is practiced only in narrative text or with repeated readings of patterned text.	
1.44	Fluency assessment allows acceptance of incorrectly decoded words if they are close in meaning to the target word (e.g., assessment based upon the cueing systems, M/S/V).	
	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading	
1.45	Letter names and associated sounds are given sufficient opportunities for practice with feedback to ensure accuracy and automaticity.	
1.46	Instruction includes teacher-led modeling, oral reading by students, and immediate feedback.	
1.47	Reading accuracy and automaticity are emphasized as the hallmarks of fluent reading.	
1.48	Word-level fluency practice is provided.	
1.49	Connected text fluency practice is provided encouraging students to read with prosody (e.g. decodable texts, poetry, readers' theater, paired reading)	
1.50	For Multilingual Learners, additional support is included whenever possible to ensure students understand the meaning of words being read.	

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Glossary
Accuracy: Decoding words without any sound/symbol errors.
Automaticity: Performing a reading task without conscious effort. For example, reading words in connected text with automaticity means that there is no conscious attention paid to decoding words.
Connected Text: Text that includes multiple sentences that are related to one another.
Prosody: Reading smoothly with expression and intonation that represents the meaning and comprehension of connected text.

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Sections 2-4: LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION, READING COMPREHENSION, AND WRITING

NON-NEGOTIABLES: LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION (LC), READING COMPREHENSION (RC), AND WRITING (W)		
Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading		**Red Flag ✓**
2-4.1	(LC, RC, W) In early grades, the instructional framework is primarily a workshop approach, emphasizing student choice and implicit, incidental, or embedded learning.	
2-4.2	(LC, RC, W) Students are not exposed to rich vocabulary and complex syntax in reading and writing materials.	
2-4.3	(RC) Comprehension activities focus mainly on assessing whether students understand content (the product of comprehension) instead of supporting the process of comprehending texts.	
2-4.4	(RC, W) Writing is not taught or is taught separately from reading at all times.	
2-4.5	(LC, RC) Questioning during read-alouds focuses mainly on lower-level questioning skills.	
Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading		
2-4.6	(LC, RC, W) There is a clear and consistent instructional framework, featuring a comprehensive scope and sequence of elements of language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing taught in an explicit system.	

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2-4.7	(LC, RC, W) Students are exposed to rich vocabulary and complex syntax in reading and writing materials and orally, including but not limited to read alouds, at language levels beyond students' reading levels.
2-4.8	(LC, RC, W) For Multilingual Learners, instruction in English language development (ELD) and acquisition is included to support reading comprehension and continued reading and writing development.

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Section 2: LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

A NOTE ON EVALUATING LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

This section may take longer to complete, so it is recommended to review after you are familiar with a curriculum's design. Elements of language comprehension may not be apparent from the lesson title, so be sure to read multiple complete lessons across grade levels to review this section.

Background Knowledge

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
2.1	Read-aloud opportunities emphasize simple stories or narrative texts. Read-aloud text is not sufficiently complex and/or does not include knowledge-building expository texts (i.e., topics related to science, social studies, current events).	
2.2	Opportunities to bridge existing knowledge to new knowledge is not apparent in instruction.	
2.3	Advanced (Grades 2-5): For students who are automatic with the code, texts for reading are primarily leveled texts that do not feature a variety of diverse, complex, knowledge-building text sets to develop background knowledge in a variety of subject areas.	
	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading	
2.4	Read-aloud opportunities (for students who are still learning the code) and text reading opportunities (for students who are automatic with the code) feature a variety of diverse, complex texts, including narrative and expository texts above grade-level to develop background knowledge and vocabulary in a variety of subject areas.	
2.5	Opportunities are provided to make connections between a new word or concept and other known words or concepts, relating ideas to experiences.	
2.6	For Multilingual Learners, opportunities are identified for building background knowledge in a students' home language and/or by using visuals and clarification whenever possible.	

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Glossary

Background Knowledge: A specific subset of knowledge needed to comprehend a particular situation, lesson, or text.
English Language Development (ELD): Instruction that is specially designed for Multilingual Learners to develop their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English.
Expository Text: Text that provides factual information about a topic.
Narrative Text: Text that relates a series of events; this can include both fiction and nonfiction.

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Vocabulary

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
2.7	Vocabulary worksheets and activities are used with little opportunity for deep understanding of vocabulary words.	
2.8	Instruction includes memorization of isolated words and definitions out of context.	
2.9	Tier 2 words are not taught explicitly and practiced; students are not given opportunities to use them in their speech, see them in print, and use them in writing.	
2.10	Students are not exposed to and taught Tier 3 words.	
2.11	Explicit instruction in morphology is not present and/or not taught according to a scope and sequence (i.e., simple to complex) consistently throughout K-5 instruction.	
	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading	
2.12	Instruction includes robust teacher-student and student-student conversations in order to support a clear understanding of vocabulary words.	
2.13	Vocabulary words are taught deeply by using concept maps or other devices that help students understand multiple layers of the word. (Anderson & Freebody, 1981)	
2.14	Explicit instruction in vocabulary for Tier 2 and 3 words is evident, as well as instruction in the context of texts (most Tier 1 words).	
2.15	Tier 2 words are taught explicitly, and students are given opportunities to use them in their speech, see them in print, and use them in writing (when appropriate).	
2.16	Explicit instruction in morphology is provided with numerous opportunities for students to read and write words with these morphemes	
2.17	For Multilingual Learners, instruction in ELD is included to support continued vocabulary development.	

Glossary
English Language Development (ELD): Instruction that is specially designed for Multilingual Learners to help develop their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English.
Morphology: The system of meaningful parts, or morphemes, that make up words.

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Tiered Vocabulary Words: A means of classifying words due to their level of difficulty and frequency of use. It is important to note that these tiers are *not* related to tiers of instruction in a Multi-Tiered System of Supports. Tier 1 Vocabulary Words: Words students already know the meaning of (e.g., house, car, dog, school). Tier 2 Vocabulary Words: Words that are not likely to be familiar to young children but reflect a concept they can identify with and can use in conversation (e.g., shiver, excitement, remarkable). Tier 2 words can appear in multiple domains and content areas. Tier 3 Vocabulary Words: Words that are low frequency and domain or content-area specific (e.g., words from math, science, history, music, art).

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Knowledge of Language Structures

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
2.18	Conventions of print, grammar, and syntax are taught implicitly or opportunistically with no evidence of consistent, explicit, simple to complex instruction across all grade levels.	
2.19	Instruction does not include teacher modeling nor sufficient opportunities for discussion.	
2.20	Students are asked to memorize parts of speech as a list without learning in context and through application.	

	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading
2.21	There is a clear scope and sequence for teaching conventions of print, grammar, and syntax (sentence structure) in reading and writing.
2.22	Instruction attends to sentence-level comprehension including simple, compound, and complex sentences, as well as cohesive devices within and among sentences.
2.23	Instruction includes sufficient time for discussion, including teacher modeling full ideas and complete sentences.
2.24	Highlighting the difference in complexity between conversational speaking and sentences found in expository texts.
2.25	For speakers of English language variations, an asset-based approach is used to engage in a contrastive analysis between home and school language including sentence structures, suffixes, and subject-verb agreement.

Glossary

Cohesive Devices: Words used to connect ideas within a sentence or text (e.g., pronouns, synonyms, connectives including coordinate and subordinate conjunctions).

Contrastive Analysis: A systematic study of two languages (or language variations) with the intent of identifying their structural similarities and differences.

Syntax: The arrangement of words to form sentences in a given language.

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Verbal Reasoning

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
2.26	Inferencing strategies are not taught explicitly and may be based only on picture clues and not text (i.e., picture walking).	
2.27	Students do not practice inference as a discrete skill.	

	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading
2.28	Inferencing is explicitly taught within text, including opportunities for metacognition and use of appropriate and accurate background knowledge.
2.29	Students are instructed how to interpret inferential language (i.e., ideas beyond the immediate context of what they read) from a text and in conversation.
2.30	Students are instructed how narrative language is used to describe a series of events, both fictional and non-fictional.
2.32	Instruction includes queries to develop a student's ability to be metacognitive (i.e., to think about their thinking while they read).

Glossary:
Inference: Using what you know and parts of text to comprehend what is not directly said in a text.
Metacognition: Developing an interactive approach with text to recognize when a text does not make sense and have options to know what to do about it.

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Literacy Knowledge

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
2.33	Genre types and features are not explicitly taught.	
2.34	Genre-specific text structures and corresponding signal words are not explicitly taught and practiced.	

	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading
2.35	Genre types and features are explicitly taught and used to support comprehension and/or build content knowledge.
2.36	Explicit instruction of text types (e.g., cause and effect, problem/solution, sequence, time order, compare and contrast).
2.37	Explicit instruction in signal words (aka connectives). For example, signal words for cause and effect texts include *for*, *because*, and *as a result* whereas signal words for problem and solution texts include *however*, *in contrast*, and *on the other hand*.
2.38	Graphic organizers are provided to support student understanding of text and genre types.

Glossary
Genre: A type of text or literature that has a particular form and style (e.g., poetry, fiction, nonfiction)
Signal Words: Words that signal readers as to the text type. For example, signal words for cause and effect texts include *for, because,* and *as a result* whereas signal words for problem and solution texts include *however, in contrast,* and *on the other hand*.

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Section 3: READING COMPREHENSION

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
3.1	Students are asked to independently read texts they are unable to decode with accuracy in order to practice reading comprehension strategies (e.g., making inferences, predicting, summarizing, visualizing).	
3.2	Students are asked to independently apply reading comprehension strategies primarily in short, disconnected readings at the expense of engaging in knowledge-building text sets.	
3.3	Emphasis on independent reading and book choice without engaging with complex texts.	
3.4	Materials for comprehension instruction are predominantly predictable and/or leveled texts.	
3.5	Students are not taught methods to monitor their comprehension while reading.	
	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading	
3.6	The foundation for reading comprehension is built through rich read-aloud experiences before children are able to read independently.	
3.7	Comprehension strategies (e.g., making inferences, summarizing) are taught via gradual release of responsibility (i.e., I do, we do, you do) using appropriate instructional text that students can accurately decode.	
3.8	Students are taught and practice comprehension-monitoring strategies.	
3.9	Advanced (Grades 2-5) For students automatic with the code, materials for reading comprehension instruction include sufficiently complex literary and knowledge-building informational texts.	

Glossary

Types of Text:

- *Decodable*: Texts with a high proportion of phonetically regular words matched to common letter-sound relationships previously taught in phonics lessons within accompanying teacher guides.
- *Leveled*: Texts leveled according to a gradient of difficulty based on multiple supportive features of the whole *text*, which allow for an emphasis on meaning, such as text structure, themes and ideas, or language and literary features.
- *Predictable*: Texts with predictable text structures such as repetitive and predictable sentences, words, and phrases.

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Section 4: WRITING

A NOTE ON EVALUATING WRITING

These elements may or may not be included in a comprehensive Tier I curriculum. For this section, review all available instructional materials both within and outside of the core curriculum.

Handwriting

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
4.1	No direct instruction in handwriting.	
4.2	Handwriting instruction predominantly features unlined paper or picture paper.	
4.3	Handwriting instruction is an isolated add-on.	
	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading	
4.4	There is explicit instruction related to handwriting (e.g., letter formation, posture, grip), and there are opportunities for cumulative practice.	
4.5	Handwriting instruction features lined paper to guide letter formation.	
4.6	Handwriting instruction is integrated into core reading and writing instruction and follows the sequence of letter learning.	

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Spelling

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
4.7	No evidence of explicit spelling instruction; no spelling scope and sequence for spelling, or the spelling scope and sequence is not aligned with the phonics / decoding scope and sequence.	
4.8	No evidence of phoneme segmentation and/or phoneme-grapheme mapping to support spelling instruction.	
4.9	Patterns in decoding are not featured in encoding/spelling; spelling lists are based on content or frequency of word use and not connected to decoding/phonics lessons.	
4.10	Students practice spelling by memorization only (e.g., rainbow writing, repeated writing, pyramid writing).	
4.11	Spelling patterns for each phoneme are taught all at once (e.g., all spellings of long /ā/) instead of a systematic progression to develop automaticity with individual grapheme/phonemes.	
	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading	
4.12	There is a clear scope and sequence for explicit spelling instruction, closely aligned with the phonics scope and sequence.	
4.13	Patterns taught for decoding are also practiced in encoding/spelling lessons.	
4.14	Spelling patterns are taught one at a time and not all at once or in a non-systematic manner.	
4.15	Extensive and recursive practice opportunities, not based on memorization, are provided to spell words both in isolation and in context.	
4.16	(Grades 2-5 Advanced Word Study): Spelling instruction continues in grades 2 and above and includes explicit instruction in vowel teams, variant vowels, and how morphology influences spelling.	

Glossary

Encoding: Using knowledge of individual phonemes in spoken words to build and spell printed words; a skill that develops reciprocally to decoding when explicitly taught.

Morphology: The system of meaningful parts, or morphemes, that make up words.

Variant Vowels: Groups of letters that produce the same vowel sound (e.g., ai, ay, eigh).

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Composition

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
4.17	Writing prompts are provided with little time for modeling, planning, and brainstorming ideas.	
4.18	Writing is primarily unstructured with few models or graphic organizers.	
4.19	Conventions, grammar, and sentence structure is not explicitly taught and practiced systematically (i.e., from simple to complex) with opportunities for practice to automaticity, instead it is taught implicitly or opportunistically.	
4.20	Writing instruction is primarily narrative or unstructured choice.	
4.21	Students are not taught the writing process (i.e., planning, revising, editing).	
4.22	Writing is taught as a standalone and is not used to further reading comprehension.	
	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading	
4.23	Writing is taught explicitly through a gradual release of responsibility (i.e., I do, we do, you do) and includes sufficient time for modeling, planning, and brainstorming ideas orally before drafting.	
4.24	Writing is structured; models and graphic organizers are provided frequently to support composition and promote executive functioning.	
4.25	The writing process (i.e., planning, revising, editing) is explicitly taught and practiced.	
4.26	Conventions of print, grammar, and syntax (i.e., sentence structure) are taught explicitly in the context of writing including sentence reduction and sentence combining.	
4.27	Writing instruction includes a variety of text types (e.g., narrative, informational, persuasive).	

Glossary
Syntax: The arrangement of words to form sentences in a given language.

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Section 5: ASSESSMENT

****Note: Many assessment systems are not featured as a part of curriculum packages. In this section, review any assessments that are included with curricular materials along with your school or Local Education Agency's (LEA) entire suite of assessments.****

NON-NEGOTIABLES: ASSESSMENT		
Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading		**Red Flag ✓**
5.1	Assessments measure comprehension only without additional assessment measures to determine what is leading to comprehension weaknesses (e.g., phonics, phoneme awareness, nonsense word fluency, decoding, encoding, fluency, vocabulary, listening comprehension).	
5.2	Assessments include miscue analysis in which misread words that have the same meaning are marked as correct.	
Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading		
5.3	A school or LEA's suite of assessments provide multiple data points to understand students' word recognition and language comprehension abilities.	
5.4	Assessment data is used to differentiate instruction across a Mutli-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) based on student progress.	
5.5	Assessments are standardized, reliable, and valid for the intended purpose.	

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Assessment

	Red Flags: Practices Not Aligned with the Science of Reading	Red Flag ✓
5.6	Assessments result in benchmarks according to a leveled text gradient.	
5.7	Foundational skills assessments are primarily running records or similar assessments that are based on whole language or cueing strategies (e.g., read the word by looking at the first letter, use picture support for decoding).	
5.8	Phonics skills are not assessed.	
5.9	Phoneme awareness is not assessed	
5.10	Decoding skills are assessed using real words only.	
5.11	Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) assessments are not used.	
5.12	Suite of assessments does not address aspects of language comprehension (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, listening comprehension).	
5.13	Multilingual Learners are not assessed in their home language.	
	Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading	
5.14	Assessments include screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring to inform instruction and prevent future reading difficulties.	
5.15	Foundational skills assessments identify students' instructional needs.	
5.16	Phonics skills are assessed using both real and nonsense words.	
5.17	Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) assessments are used to assess fluency, usually first grade and beyond.	
5.18	A systematic spelling survey/spelling inventory is used to analyze students' applications of phonemes, graphemes, and morphemes.	
5.19	Phonological and phoneme awareness (PA) are assessed in K/1 and for older students who exhibit PA weaknesses as evidenced by appropriate assessment.	

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5.20	Assessments address both word recognition and language comprehension (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, writing, listening comprehension).
5.21	Trends in groups of student scores can be used to identify the overall effectiveness of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).
5.22	Multilingual Learners are assessed in their home language when available.

Glossary
Diagnostic Assessments: Used to assess specific skills or components of reading (such as phonics or fluency) to help educators plan targeted and individualized instruction.
Grapheme: A letter or letter combination that spells a phoneme; it can be one, two, three, or four letters in English (e.g., i, ou, igh, ough).
Morpheme: The smallest unit of a word that carries meaning (e.g., prefix, suffix, base element).
Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS): A framework for school improvement that ensures all students are supported to meet positive academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes beginning with core instruction in Tier I and interventions at increasing intensity at Tiers 2 and 3.
Phoneme: The smallest unit of sound in a spoken word; an individual speech sound.
Progress Monitoring: More frequent assessments given to students receiving intervention that measure progress toward acquiring specific skills.
Reliable: The extent to which assessments are consistent over time within the same settings with the same type of subjects.
Screening/Screeners: Brief assessments given to all students to determine which students are at risk of struggling with reading.
Standardized: Administered and scored in a consistent manner.
Syllable Types: The six common syllable patterns in English: closed, open, vowel-consonant-e, r-controlled, vowel team, and consonant-le.
Systematic Instruction: The use of a planned, logical sequence to introduce elements taught, building from the simplest to those that are more complex.
Valid: The extent to which an assessment is accurate (i.e., whether or not it measures what it is supposed to measure).

These guidelines include elements of instruction related to word recognition, language comprehension, reading comprehension, writing, and assessment aligned and not-aligned with the science of reading. This resource does not include other essential, contextual elements including student representation in culturally responsive texts, differentiated learning opportunities to support neurodiverse learners, cultural and linguistic diversity of materials, and opportunities for text choice in older grades. Consider these and other factors when selecting a curriculum that provides equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Additionally, these guidelines serve as an overview. For a more comprehensive rating system of "look for" elements, consider referring to the Colorado Department of Education's Core, Supplemental, and Intervention Curriculum Review Rubrics, and/or the REL Rubric for Evaluating Reading/Language Arts Instructional Materials for Kindergarten to Grade 5.

NOTES: This tool is to be considered a "living document" meaning that it will be periodically updated based on user feedback, suggestions for optimizing use, etc. Email questions, feedback, and additional suggested citations to info@thereadingleague.org. We thank everyone who contributed to the content of this resource.

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Reference Section

This reference section begins with influential reports that consolidate evidence of how to teach reading and writing. The *Introduction* section is supported with research demonstrating principles of teaching reading and writing according to findings from the science of reading, which is a body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing (see Defining Guide, 2022 for an explanation of what constitutes scientifically-based research). The inclusion of metaanalyses (a systematic literature review) in each section provides the converging evidence of findings for each section. This reference section provides a reliable collection of studies that provide potent evidence to implement the "Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading."

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