

What Are The *Five* Essential Elements of Reading?

In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) issued a report that identified **five areas that they found critical for effective reading instruction**:

1. Phonemic awareness
2. Phonics
3. Fluency
4. Vocabulary
5. Comprehension.



Element #1: Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with the discrete sounds in spoken words. Reading research has consistently found that the ability to hear discrete sounds is important for reading. The ability to hear sounds in language is referred to as **phonological awareness** (Combs, 2002). Strengthening your child's phonemic and phonological awareness involves helping them to recognize, single out, and manipulate letters. You can encourage your child to participate in activities and play games that involve connecting, sorting, and manipulating sounds and rhymes. Nursery rhymes help children to associate discrete sounds with specific letters.

Students practice listening to poems, rhymes, and stories with repetitive refrains, rhymes, and language patterns. When writing, students learn to say words slowly to hear discrete sounds at the beginning, middle, and end of words. Reading aloud to children and engaging children in word-play activities help to build phonemic awareness.

Essential Element #2: Phonics

Phonics involves the relationships between letters and individual sounds, (also called phonemes), and helping children to recognize that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken words. The alphabet is considered to be a basic tool of the reader and writer, and many children have incomplete knowledge of letter-sound relationships.

You can help your child by helping them to make familiar letter and sound associations familiar. Try taking single words and sorting them by sounds and letters or try helping your child to create their own personalized alphabet book. Encourage your child to write letters on a variety of surfaces and use magnetic letters. Magnetic letters are a great tool to teach your child to recognize sound-spelling patterns. White erase boards and chalk boards are also great tools. Children have the opportunity to strengthen their phonics knowledge when reading aloud, writing words, and creating stories.

Element #3: Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read a text quickly and accurately. Fluent readers recognize words automatically and group words as they read, creating a flow of words rather than pauses between words. Fluency develops with practice- children become more fluent readers the more they read! You can encourage your child to read by taking them to the local library and encouraging them to borrow books. If your child doesn't already have their very own library card you can help them to get one.

You can also help your child to increase word recognition by encouraging them to make flash cards of high frequency words (also called sight words). Words like the, he, she, said, why, take, give, yes, no, can, what, where and who are examples of some sight words. Strong phonics skills are needed to decode new words and strengthen fluency. Encourage your child to read familiar books over and over again, this helps them to develop fluency, phrasing, word recognition and most importantly confidence in reading. Children that read daily become better and faster at reading.

Element #4: Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to words and their meanings. Research has shown that vocabulary knowledge is an important predictor of reading comprehension ability. Children must have good vocabulary skills in order to communicate effectively; these skills apply to speaking, listening, reading, and writing. You can help your child to have a large vocabulary by working with individual words, words in sentences, or in words meaningful text. You can teach your child about homonyms (words that are spelled and/or said the same way but have different meanings like *lead*), synonyms (different words with similar or exact meanings like *baby and infant*), and antonyms (words that have opposite meaning like *hot and cold*).

You can also play games to test their knowledge of different words. When children learn the meanings of word parts, such as “un”, “dis” and “bi,” it helps them to figure out the meanings of new words. Many children use context clues (clues in the picture or text) to figure out what different words mean, however children need to have other strategies to use. You can help your child by introducing a new book to them and familiarizing your child with new and difficult words that will appear in the book. You can also encourage your child to use new vocabulary when writing to make it more expressive and detailed.

Element #5: Comprehension

Comprehension refers to the ability to understand what one is reading. Comprehension is more than just reading (or decoding) the words aloud. Did you know that when children are learning to read they are without knowing what many of the words they are reading actually mean? Children with strong comprehension skills are able to relate the text they are reading to what they already know, while constructing new knowledge and understanding.

Two important types of comprehension for parents to know about are:

- 1) Literal Comprehension
- 2) Inferential Comprehension



Literal comprehension refers to understanding the factual information within the text.

Inferential comprehension refers to the understanding one has of the relationship between text and personal experiences. For example in a picture with a story character covering their ears, a literal understanding would be that the character has their hands on their ears. A child with inferential comprehension skills may say that the character has their hands over their ears because the music they hear is too loud (referring another character playing a guitar). In order for children to appreciate, evaluate or responding emotionally to a text, they must be able to relate to the text using personal background knowledge. You can help your child to build their background knowledge by taking them to different places and talking to them often,

Reading needs to be useful, enjoyable, and meaningful. You can help your child to gain both types of comprehension by encouraging them to make predictions, ask questions and to form opinions while reading. You can also help them to make the connection between their book and their own background knowledge and personal experiences. Before you read with your child you can introduce key ideas in the text in order to increase their ability to understand the text. It is important to encourage your child to read wide variety of books and genres like fiction, non-fiction and informational books like autobiographies and poems.

Remember that you are your child’s teacher at home and by encouraging your child to read you are actually creating a strong foundation for their future academic success!

Please contact NH State P.I.R.C at (603).224.7005 or (866).9NH.PIRC for help teaching your child how to read. The NH State P.I.R.C can help you to have the tools and knowledge you need to be the best teacher for your child!

This information was created by Literacy Collaborative at Lesley University, modified by NH State PIRC