

Improving Literacy Brief

LEARNING TO READ: “THE SIMPLE VIEW OF READING”

THE SIMPLE VIEW OF READING

Learning to read consists of developing skills in two critical areas: (1) Reading each word in texts accurately and fluently and (2) Comprehending the meaning of texts being read. This is known as the Simple View of Reading.

To read words accurately and fluently, students need strategies to read words they have never seen before in print as well as words they have previously encountered. To understand the meaning of texts, students must have sufficient language comprehension skills. For example, if a text says, "the little dog barked at the big cat," a proficient reader must be able to read each word accurately and also know what the words mean in this specific sentence.

Learning these skills does not come naturally. Both accurate word reading and text comprehension require careful, systematic instruction. And, once formal reading instruction begins in school, instruction in both of these areas should occur on a daily basis.

ACCURATE, FLUENT READING

Reading words accurately is complex: it requires the integration of visual, auditory, and cognitive skills. For example, reading the word “cat” accurately in print requires the following:

- Seeing each letter (three different letters in “cat”—visual acuity);
- Producing the sound each letter makes (in “cat,” each letter makes a distinct sound—auditory perception);
- Putting the individual sounds together to pronounce the word (the three sounds are put together quickly to produce “cat”—a cognitive skill).

LEARNING TO READ: “THE SIMPLE VIEW OF READING”

Fluency improves as students become familiar with seeing the same words in print over and over. They begin to recognize these words automatically and can pronounce them quickly and easily.

Reading words accurately with increased fluency helps set the stage for figuring out what the text means. Reading “dig” for “dog” or “baked” for “barked,” or not having any idea how to accurately read or decode these words hinders comprehension.

COMPREHENDING THE MEANING OF TEXT

To understand the example sentence about “dogs and cats,” students must know what dogs and cats are. They must know what “bark” means and understand that “little” and “big” refer to size concepts.

Background knowledge also assists comprehension. Understanding will be improved if students know something about why a dog *might* bark at a cat (which the sentence does not say explicitly). Students might also sense the irony of a *little* dog barking at a *big* cat.

CONCLUSION

Reading involves a complex integration of skills. Proficient readers seem to make the process look effortless, but reading instruction for all students requires systematic instruction in both word reading and comprehension. For students in the early stages of reading, or for those who struggle, reading is particularly difficult and requires careful instruction and intervention. Problem areas must be determined, and instruction and intervention to address these areas must be carefully planned and delivered.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Baker, S.K., Fien, F., Nelson, N. J., Petscher, Y., Sayko, S., & Turtura, J. (2017). *Learning to read: “The simple view of reading”*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education Programs, National Center on Improving Literacy. Retrieved from improvingliteracy.org

LEARNING TO READ: “THE SIMPLE VIEW OF READING”

REFERENCES

Adams, M.J. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Gough, P.B. & Tunmer, W.E. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, 7, 6-10.

National Reading Panel (U.S.), & National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (U.S.). (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read : an evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction: reports of the subgroups*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health.

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (eds.) (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

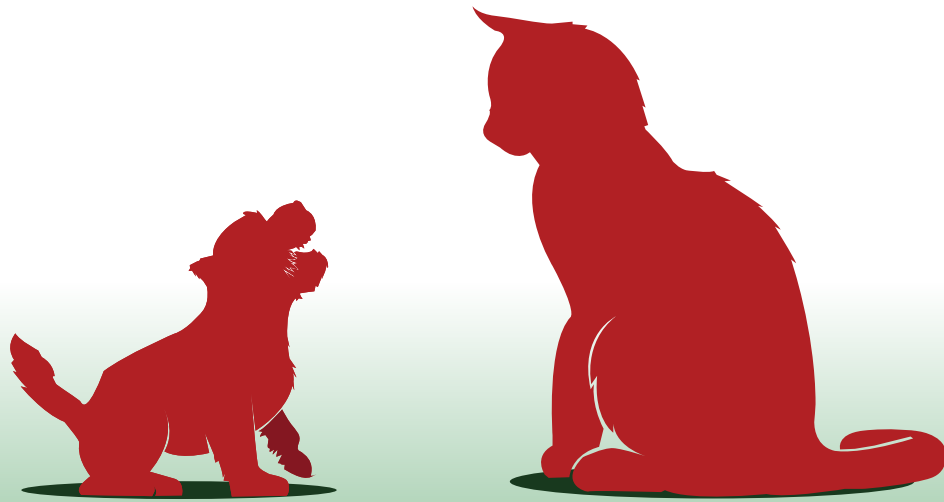


National Center on
Improving Literacy

The research reported here is funded by a grant to the National Center on Improving Literacy from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, in partnership with the Office of Special Education Programs (Award #: S283D160003). The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views or policies of OESE, OSEP, or the U.S. Department of Education. You should not assume endorsement by the Federal government. © National Center on Improving Literacy.

improvingliteracy.org | twitter.com/NCILiteracy | facebook.com/improvingliteracy

The Simple View of Reading



"The little dog barked at the big cat."

Accuracy & Fluency

Meaning

The littledogbarkedat
thebigcat.

Seeing each letter but not
knowing what sounds
these letters represent.

The...l...i...tt...le...d...o...g...b...ar...
k...ed...a...t...the...b...i...g...c...a...t

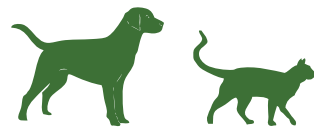
Producing the sounds the
letters make, but it takes a
lot of effort.

The little dog barked
at the big cat.

Putting the individual
sounds together easily to
pronounce each word.

?

No meaning associated.



Recognizing each word,
but not the overall
meaning of the sentence.



Fully grasping the
meaning of the sentence.