

## How to Teach Reading the Way Good Readers Read



As you look ahead to another year of reading instruction, are you enthused or confused? You may have heard that adding some phonics to your "guided reading" instruction isn't making an impact. You may wonder if your strategies for comprehension are as effective as building background knowledge. In this issue and the next, we'll explore these key factors in the reading comprehension equation.

### The Three Cueing System: How a Flawed Idea is Teaching Millions of Kids to be Poor Readers

Over the past few years, the role of systematic phonics instruction has gained more widespread recognition and acceptance. So much so that the International Literacy Association recently endorsed it. Such explicit instruction is essential for about 60% of children, with all gaining some advantage.

Despite the inclusion of whole-class phonics instruction in many schools, reading proficiency has remained stagnant. The latest NAEP scores reveal that one-third of fourth graders can't read at a basic level. Education reporter Emily Hanford has uncovered one of the reasons why.

In her American Public Media Reports podcast, "At a Loss for Words: How a Flawed Idea is Teaching Millions of Kids to be Poor Readers," Hanford describes how the three-cueing system undermines the point of phonics instruction. This approach teaches students to guess at words, rather than decoding them. Also known as MSV, it prioritizes **M**eaning and **S**entence structure over **V**isual information (the letters in words).

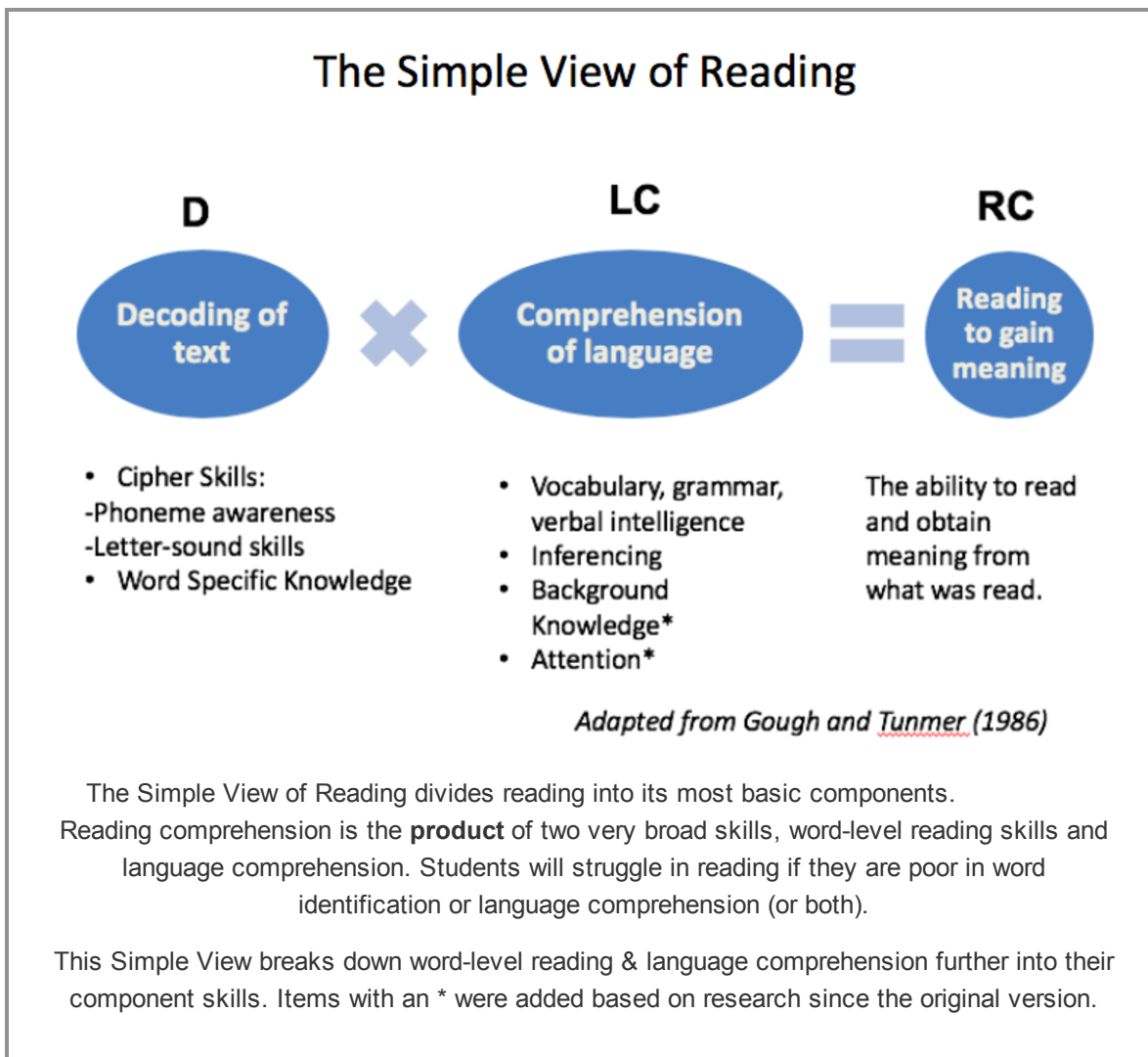
Once learned, these habits are hard to break. Since phonics is challenging for many students, some will avoid sounding out a word in favor of guessing. A child who primarily relies on guessing strategies—such as using pictures clues and skipping tricky words—will be stymied when faced with higher level texts, no pictures, and harder vocabulary.

There is ample scientific evidence against three-cueing. According to David Kilpatrick, "The three-cueing system is the way poor readers read." Furthermore, teaching students the three-cueing system impedes their orthographic mapping. This essential process occurs when students "pay attention to the details of a written word and link the word's pronunciation and meaning with its sequence of letters." Over time, it becomes automatic.

### Does Guessing Really Make Sense? What's a Teacher to Do?

Perhaps you were taught the three-cueing system during your preservice-training. Maybe your district uses a "balanced literacy" approach, teaching some phonics alongside the cueing system. What's a teacher to do? Take down those cueing posters and try flipping the word-attack script. Leverage your phonics instruction by prioritizing decoding over context. If you already teach decoding as the first line of word attack, talk with three-cueing believers. Share the science and your success. Change is hard. Encourage others.

Ken Goodman, the progenitor of three-cueing, still stands by his assertion that "Word recognition is a preoccupation ... I teach people to make sense of language. And learning words is incidental to that." We stand by The Simple View of Reading. In order to gain meaning, students have to be able to decipher words, and know their meaning. Goodman's hit-or-miss "psycholinguistic guessing game" just doesn't make sense.



### Further Learning

- Hear Emily Hanford on Monday, September 30 at Bay Path University, sponsored by The Reading Institute. And on Thursday, October 17 as the keynote speaker at The Third Annual Conference of The Reading League.
- Facilitate a discussion of this podcast at your school with this Discussion Guide from The Right to Read Project.
- Register for our Fall '19 Structured Literacy Series, which begins on September 26. This 30-hr series runs once-a-month from September to January 2020.

**Up Next: Bridging the Knowledge Gap** The language comprehension factor.

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