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4 Key Elements to Grow Skilled Readers

Literacy is the **foundation for success** in school and beyond

According to research in the science of reading, skilled reading happens when students become fluent in their word recognition skills, like decoding, and can then focus more of their attention on advanced skills, like activating background knowledge and making inferences.

Becoming a skilled reader is an exciting moment for students. Reading takes on a whole new meaning as they get to explore the worlds of "Holes," Shel Silverstein, and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

While texts now become a main source of information for learning in school, it doesn't mean that students stop learning to read. They must continue developing their literacy skills and building content knowledge to understand more advanced texts as they move through school.

We've identified four key elements for educators to ensure they're providing the skill development, context, and background to grow and support skilled readers.

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4 Key Elements to Grow Skilled Readers

EFFECTIVE SKILL-BUILDING STRATEGIES

Provide opportunities to practice key skills and critical thinking with content-rich materials rooted in learning science.

HIGH-QUALITY CONTENT

Create authentic learning experiences in ELA classrooms with materials that cover endless curricular and high-interest topics, standards, and skills.

ONGOING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Redefine assessment's role in daily instruction to drive student learning.

DIFFERENTIATION FOR ALL LEARNERS

Empower teachers to respond to students' needs with scaffolding support for whole-class, small-group, and individual instruction.

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Prioritize skill-building strategies in every lesson

As skilled readers, students must learn how to engage more deeply with texts, determine whether they understand what they're reading, and connect new information to what they already know.

But it's hard to get students to master those advanced skills if they don't see any relevance between their lives—or their schoolwork—and the topics in their texts.

That's why teaching priority skills is most effective when it's paired with knowledge building, in the context of interesting, relevant, and curriculum-aligned topics.

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Reading Skills: Fiction for Secondary Readers

ARTICLE
Twelve-year-old entrepreneur in Texas rolling in the cookie dough

What the text says

Connecting People, Events, Ideas

ARTS & CULTURE
The science of ghosts

What the text says   Main idea

ARTS & CULTURE
Make glasses cool with new emojis, urges United Kingdom schoolgirl

What the text says

Connecting People, Events, Ideas

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What are the best ways to build literacy skills?

Through explicit instruction and modeling of skills and strategies

Modeling expert reading in whole-group, small-group, or one-on-one sessions helps students understand how to think about the texts that they read. Better yet, it shows them why reading critically and asking questions matters.

Newsela ELA's teacher-facing Lesson Sparks provide ways for educators to help students question texts, summarize passages, analyze word choices, and make inferences with help and then transition to doing it on their own. Use them as a guide to promote strategic reading skills through direct instruction and modeling to help students comprehend a text.

By using annotations to engage in active and strategic reading

Annotations help teachers engage their students in active reading. When students are engaged in active reading it helps them monitor their understanding of a text as they go. This allows them to go back and re-read for anything they may have missed.

Newsela ELA's annotation feature lets teachers model and call out key focus areas within a text. They can embed questions into the text that target specific skills or provide vocabulary supports and scaffolds to check for understanding throughout a text.

By thinking about, discussing, and writing about texts after reading

Writing plays a big part in building strategic reading skills, vocabulary, and even phonics through spelling. It encourages students to summarize what they read and synthesize new ideas with support from a text.

Newsela ELA's writing prompts let students "show what they know" through consolidated learning by using the information they annotated while reading as evidence for making a claim or supporting a point on a text-related question.

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Literacy skills and content knowledge have a reciprocal relationship that drives learning

You can make every lesson relevant with high-quality, engaging content.

Neuroscience research shows that the brain uses prior knowledge as a foundation for encountering, processing, and constructing new knowledge. It takes a lot of content knowledge to learn across subject areas, so students gain it a little bit at a time.

Content-rich instruction provides many opportunities for reading across topics and genres to make this incremental learning happen.

When students practice ELA skills in content-rich lessons, their interests and imaginations pave the way for learning that sticks.

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TEXT SET

Historical Fiction

FICTION

The Hunger Ship

What the text says

Point of view & purpose

TEXT SET

Myths and Legends

FICTION

The Hare in the Moon: a Buddhist Story

What the text says

Point of view & purpose

What are the characteristics of high-quality content?

Contextualized

Most basal readers for ELA education are focused on teaching a skill, but they're completely out of context from the real world and students' lives. According to the science of reading, when students can connect what they're reading to a classroom lesson or real-world event, it makes recalling and taking in new information easier.

Newsela ELA ensures teachers have comprehensive content that covers, in-depth, any topic they'd ever want to discuss and share in the classroom. With 15,000+ texts covering 20+ genres, skill-building activities embedded right into the content, and text sets curated by curriculum experts teachers can discover an array of content to build skills and background knowledge at the same time.

Authentic

Core curricula may under- or misrepresent certain groups and viewpoints. Texts written by real people about their lived experiences are the most authentic and engaging for students. With partnerships from over 175 publishers, Newsela ELA provides these authentic texts from a variety of unheard perspectives to help students explore content that mirrors their lived experiences and lets them see issues from other people's perspectives.

Relevant

Students often think the texts they see in school aren't relevant to their lives, so they avoid reading them. Newsela ELA provides authentic content to make reading in school more relevant for students. But it also encourages student choice when reading across topics to let students pick what content is most relevant to them, and the most engaging.

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Practice ongoing formative assessment to provide targeted instruction and feedback

In most schools and districts, there's a disconnect between assessments and daily instruction. Results from interim assessments are too infrequent or come too late to help teachers adjust day-to-day instruction to give meaningful, timely feedback.

Every-day data, like that collected from ongoing formative assessments, is a better option for teachers to provide individualized and targeted feedback and instructions to students, no matter where they are in their learning journey.

INFORMATION

What is a logical fallacy?

Activities

Quiz

WORD MEANING & CHOICE

How is the author's point of view similar to Magedah Shabo's point of view?

Correct Answer

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How does ongoing formative assessment benefit ELA instruction?

It creates a data feedback loop

[Frequent low-stakes assessments](#) create a data feedback loop that allows both students and teachers to understand student knowledge and skills. With formative assessments accompanying all content on Newsela ELA, teachers gain insights in real-time that let them adjust lessons, leveling, and strategies to meet students where they're at and prepare them to improve.

It ties lessons to standards

When you tie formative assessments to curricular standards—like understanding of content, themes, and text—you get valuable feedback about student progress and insights into areas for review, reteaching, and enrichment. Use Newsela ELA's new search filters and skill labels on articles to find content that aligns with the right skills and standards for each lesson.

It provides multiple ways to differentiate and assess knowledge and skills

Differentiating assessment can be just as important as differentiating content when helping students learn, practice, and build to grade-level standards. Newsela ELA's integration with Formative allows educators to customize assessments with a variety of question types—like multiple choice, audio response, and even drawing—to help students practice and respond in a way that makes it easiest for them to share what they know and learn.

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Differentiation meets students where they are and helps build their skills

We all know that students enter the classroom at various learning levels and with diverse educational backgrounds. And that it's more effective for them to access grade-level topics and work on their reading skills when they're reading at the level that's right for them.

But what counts as the "right" level depends on the teacher's learning goal. Do you want students to read independently with accuracy and fluency to understand concepts? Or do you want to challenge them with more complex texts by using guided reading groups to model skills and comprehension strategies?

Both options have a time and place in the classroom. But they require differentiation in texts, resources, and activities to make them happen. Because students learn at different rates, one-size-fits-all instruction rarely works. That's why educators need ways to differentiate lessons and activities to meet the needs of all learners.

What types of differentiated content helps students grow and become successful readers?

Leveled

Core materials typically lack differentiation that allows students of different ability levels to access the same texts or resources as their peers. To align with the science of reading, teachers should aim to provide multiple versions of the same resources and information at different complexity levels so students can read on their own with accuracy, build fluency, and increase background knowledge.

Newsela ELA provides all nonfiction texts at five different reading levels to make differentiation with the same content easy, while still giving teachers the ability to control the level students access and assign grade-level reading when it makes sense.

Diverse

Texts that show multiple sides of any topic help students with comprehension, motivation, and engagement in learning. They also help students make connections among their background knowledge, personal experiences, and the experiences of others.

Newsela ELA provides content on all topics from a variety of viewpoints to introduce students to diverse perspectives.

Language Matched

English Learners (ELs) may have strong comprehension skills in their native language, but struggle to show them in English because of the language barrier. Differentiating the same content by reading level or language can help students learn and progress at their own pace.

Newsela ELA makes it easier for ELs to understand content in class and for educators to get a more accurate picture of what they know and understand by providing the option to share many texts in both English and Spanish.

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Drive **meaningful student outcomes** with content-rich literacy instruction

Newsela ELA helps fill gaps in students' literacy and content knowledge by providing diverse, high-interest content with powerful scaffolding tools.

Its explicit instructional guidance, frequent assessment opportunities, and supportive features build on the four key elements to grow skilled readers and assure that your teachers can deliver the skills, background knowledge, and vocabulary students need.

Ready to drive meaningful student outcomes in your classroom, school, or district? Contact us today or try Newsela for free!

Newsela ELA is research-backed! Students who read and take quizzes twice per week on Newsela ELA see as many as three additional months of literacy skill growth by the end of the school year.

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