

What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guide on *Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4–9*

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Samantha Wavell

Moderator

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Dr. Russell Gersten

Presenter

Russell Gersten, Ph.D., Special Education, is the executive director at Instructional Research Group (IRG) and professor emeritus of special education at the University of Oregon. He is a nationally renowned expert in MTSS and reading and mathematics intervention, instruction for English learners, professional development, and translating research into practice. He has directed or co-directed 61 applied research grants, contracts, and subcontracts, totaling more than \$50 million. He has served on two Presidentially-appointed panels involving English learners and mathematics. He has been chair or Principal investigator for four practice guides on MTSS in reading and mathematics.



Dr. Sharon Vaughn

Presenter

Sharon Vaughn, Ph.D., is the Manuel J. Justiz Endowed Chair in Education and the Executive Director of The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk, an organized research unit that she founded with a “make a wish” gift from the Meadows Foundation family. She is the recipient of numerous awards including the first woman in the history of The University of Texas to receive the Distinguished Faculty and Research Award, the CEC research award, the AERA SIG distinguished researcher award, and the Jeannette E. Fleischner Award for Outstanding Contributions in the Field of LD from CEC. She is currently Principal Investigator on several Institute for Education Sciences, National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, and U.S. Department of Education research grants.



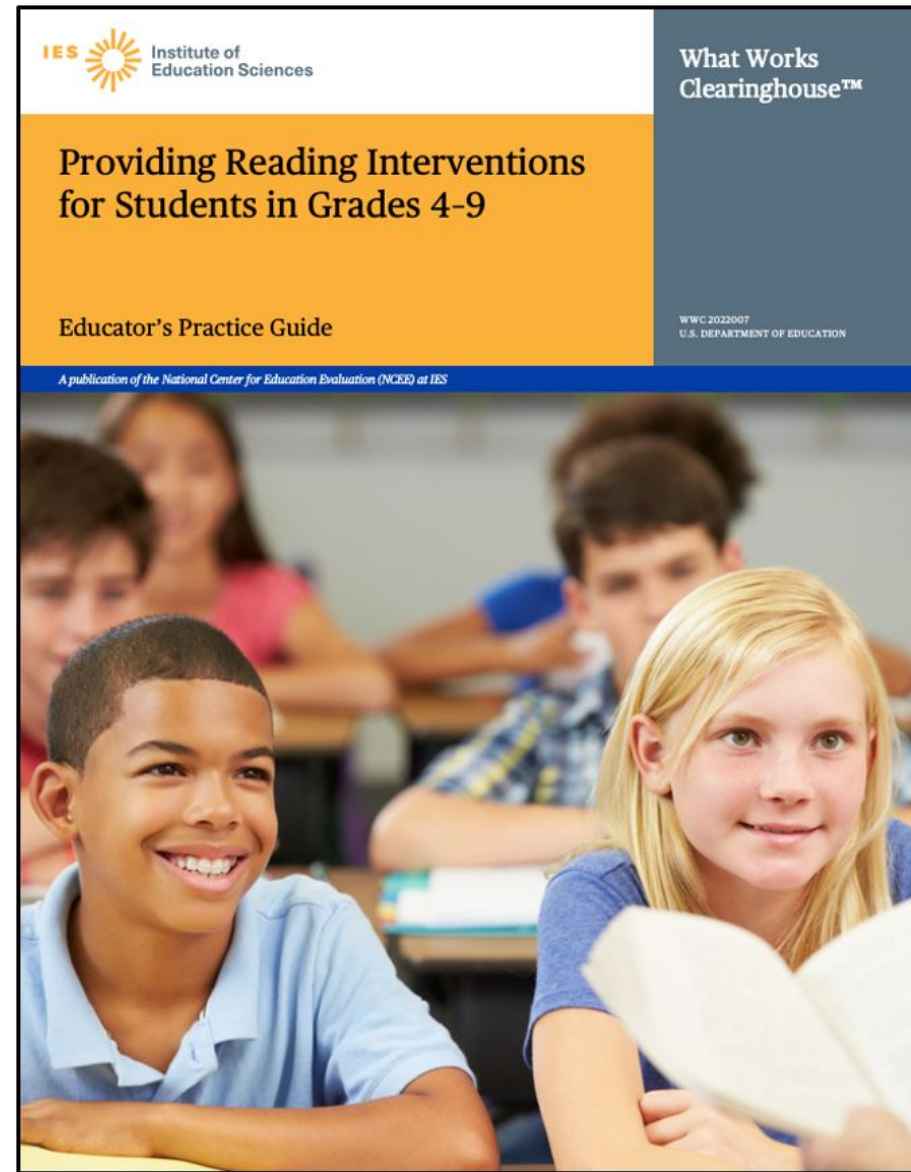
Dr. Kimberly St. Martin

Presenter

Kimberly St. Martin, Ph.D., currently serves as the director of Michigan's Multi-Tiered System of Support (MiMTSS) Technical Assistance Center. She was previously the co-director of a federally funded adolescent literacy model demonstration grant, and co-principal investigator of a federally funded IES grant evaluating a state-level initiative to implement supplemental academic and behavioral interventions in an MTSS framework. She supports various state departments in their efforts to implement an MTSS framework to accelerate outcomes. She collaborates with the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Effective Implementation Cohort. She has co-authored the Reading Tiered Fidelity Inventory (R-TFI) and implementation capacity assessments for districts and Regional Educational Agencies to guide their supporting infrastructures for an MTSS framework.



Introduction



Panel of Reading Experts

- Sharon Vaughn (Chair), *University of Texas at Austin*
- Michael J. Kieffer, *New York University*
- Margaret McKeown, *University of Pittsburgh*
- Deborah K. Reed, *University of Iowa*
- Michele Sanchez, *Ysleta Independent School District, El Paso, Texas*
- Kimberly St. Martin, *MiMTSS TA Center, Michigan Department of Education*
- Jade Wexler, *University of Maryland*

Who Might Find This Guide Useful

- Educators providing reading intervention or those who oversee MTSS in reading
- Special educators, teachers, intervention teachers, reading specialists and coaches, and trained volunteers
- School, district, or state personnel involved in adopting intervention curricula
- And parents/caregivers seeking to help children

Levels of Evidence

- **Strong:** There is consistent evidence that meets WWC standards and indicates that the practices improve outcomes for a diverse student population.
- **Moderate:** There is some evidence meeting WWC standards that the practices improve student outcomes, but there may be ambiguity about whether that improvement is the direct result of the practices or whether the findings can be replicated with a diverse population of students.

There is also a **Minimal** level of evidence, which was not needed for this guide.

Recommendations and corresponding levels of evidence

Practice recommendation	Level of evidence		
	Minimal	Moderate	Strong
1. Build students' decoding skills so they can read complex multisyllabic words.			✓
2. Provide purposeful fluency-building activities to help students read effortlessly.			✓
3. Routinely use a set of comprehension-building practices to help students make sense of the text.			✓
4. Provide students with opportunities to practice making sense of stretch text (i.e., challenging text) that will expose them to complex ideas and information.		✓	

Recommendation 1: Multisyllabic word reading

Build students' decoding skills so they can read complex multisyllabic words.

Level of Evidence: Strong

Recommendation 1: *Build students' decoding skills so they can read complex multisyllabic words.*

How-to Step 1: Identify the level of students' word-reading skills in the intervention group and teach vowel and consonant letter-sounds and combinations, as necessary.

How-to Step 2: Teach students a routine they can use to decode multisyllabic words.

How-to Step 3: Embed spelling instruction in the lesson.

How-to Step 4: Engage students in a wide array of activities that allow them to practice reading multisyllabic words accurately and with increasing automaticity.



Example: Activities to build students' automaticity with word reading.

1. As a warm-up provide practice in vowel combinations in the multisyllabic words that students are going to encounter in a word list or section of text for the session.
2. Read a list of high-frequency prefixes and suffixes aloud as a group (in unison or by taking turns).
3. Ask students to underline prefixes and suffixes in each word in a word list, and then read the prefixes and suffixes aloud as a group (in unison or by taking turns).
4. Ask students to write words by adding a prefix and/or a suffix to a base word.
5. Ask students to read a list of words once with their partner, noting any words students have difficulty reading. Then ask them to try to read more words correctly when they read the list to their partner a second time.
6. Read a list of words (up to 20 words) aloud as a group (in unison or by taking turns).
7. Time students as they read a list of words. Ask them to read the list again to meet or beat their previous time.
8. Dictate words for students to spell that contain the targeted prefixes and suffixes or sounds in the lesson.
9. Read sentences containing multisyllabic words aloud as a group (in unison or by taking turns) or with the teacher reading first and then the students reading next.
10. Ask students to read the passage containing the words they are learning at least twice.

Source: Toste et al. (2019).



Obstacle: A few of my students can read multisyllabic words pretty effortlessly but perform poorly on reading tests because of weak vocabulary and difficulties in comprehension.

- These students need additional work on language and vocabulary development. Therefore, teachers should minimize decoding and fluency instruction and maximize comprehension instruction.
- When possible, group these students in an intervention that focuses on oral language and reading comprehension.
- Activities should include experiences that increase world knowledge and word knowledge and provide ample opportunities to engage students in meaningful discussion about the text they are reading.

Recommendation 2: Fluency building

Provide purposeful fluency-building activities to help students read effortlessly.

Level of Evidence: Strong

Recommendation 2: *Provide purposeful fluency-building activities to help students read effortlessly.*

How-to Step 1: *Provide a purpose for each repeated reading.*

How-to Step 2: *Focus some instructional time on reading with prosody.*

How-to Step 3: *Regularly provide opportunities for students to read a wide range of texts.*



Obstacle: *It is hard to find materials that include the words or patterns the students are learning, relate to subject-area topics, are age-appropriate, and increase in difficulty.*

- Often published programs contain word lists and passages for fluency instruction. If a published program is not available, choose words and passages from a variety of sources, including subject-area textbooks, novels, newspapers, or electronic resources, that emphasize the sound patterns, words, or content of the lesson.
- Schedule time during grade-level or department meetings to collect and develop materials to address the skills you are teaching. Over time you will have materials that span a wide range of topics and vary in difficulty.

Recommendation 3: Comprehension building

Routinely use a set of comprehension-building practices to help students make sense of the text.

Level of Evidence: Strong

Parts of Recommendation 3: *Routinely use a set of comprehension-building practices to help students make sense of the text.*

Part A: Build students' world and word knowledge so they can make sense of the text.

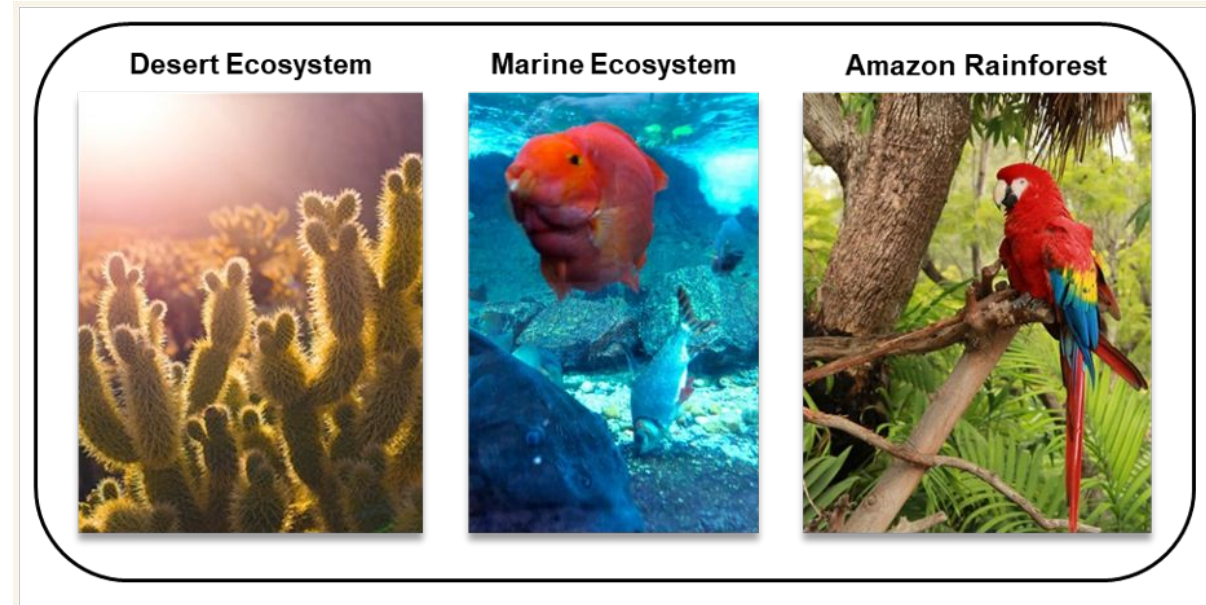
Part B: Consistently provide students with opportunities to ask and answer questions to better understand the text they read.

Part C: Teach students a routine for determining the gist of a short section of text.

Part D: Teach students to monitor their comprehension as they read.

How-to Step 1: *Develop world knowledge that is relevant for making sense of the passage.*

- Provide a brief 3- to 5-minute introduction on the topic before reading to help students develop knowledge that might help them understand what they are reading.
- Another way to prepare students for reading about a topic is to present a short 2- to 4-minute video clip, podcast, or brief informational lecture with illustrations.



Source: The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk (2015).

Recommendation 3, Part A: *Build students' world and word knowledge so they can make sense of the text.*

How-to Step 1: *Develop world knowledge that is relevant for making sense of the passage.*

How-to Step 2: *Teach the meaning of a few words that are essential for understanding the passage.*

How-to Step 3: *Teach students how to derive meanings of unknown words using context.*

How-to Step 4: *Teach prefixes and suffixes to help students derive meanings of words.*

How-to Step 5: *Teach the meaning of Latin and Greek roots.*



Obstacle: *There are so many words my students do not know. Working on word knowledge could take up the entire lesson.*

- Focus on words that are essential to understanding the passage and those that students will encounter frequently in their readings.
- If not knowing the meaning of a particular word becomes a barrier to understanding the text, quickly provide the meaning of the word and continue reading.
- Show students how to use dictionaries and thesauruses.

Recommendation 3, Part B: *Consistently provide students with opportunities to ask and answer questions to better understand the text they read.*

How-to Step 1: Explicitly teach students how to find and justify answers to different types of questions.

How-to Step 2: Provide ample opportunities for students to collaboratively answer questions.

How-to Step 3: Teach students to ask questions about the text while reading.

Recommendation 3, Part C: *Teach students a routine for determining the gist of a short section of text.*

How-to Step 1: Model how to use a routine to generate gist statements.

How-to Step 2: Teach students how to use text structures to generate gist statements.

How-to Step 3: Work collaboratively with students to generate gist statements.



Obstacle: *Students get tired of generating gist statements day after day.*

- Including a variety of activities can be helpful. After spending some time devoted primarily to learning how to generate a gist statement, spend time on other areas of comprehension, such as word knowledge or asking and answering questions.



Obstacle: Sometimes, I think my students have finally learned how to generate gist statements. But then, a few days later, we get to a new piece of reading material, and it all falls apart. Will they ever learn how to do it?

- As texts get more difficult or students encounter unfamiliar topics, generating gist statements becomes more challenging, and students will need more support and discussion.
- Students may have trouble with a harder text when they do not have enough world and/or word knowledge.
- Continue to ask students to generate gist statements so they can continue to work the skill with harder and harder text.

Recommendation 3, Part D: *Teach students to monitor their comprehension as they read.*

How-to Step 1: *Help students determine when they do not understand the text.*

How-to Step 2: *Teach students to ask themselves questions as they read to check their understanding and figure out what the text is about.*

How-to Step 3: *Provide opportunities for students to reflect on what they have learned.*



Obstacle: *My students are reticent to share what they did not understand.*

- Helping students feel comfortable sharing when they are not understanding what they are reading may take time.
- Some students may not feel comfortable at first. They may want to hide their confusion, or they may not be accustomed to identifying when they are stuck.
- Repeatedly and gently, encourage students to share when they need help and remind them that you are there to help.



Obstacle: *I keep stopping every two minutes to make sure they are understanding what they read. This does not seem to be working well.*

- It can be hard to follow along with the text if you are stopping too often. If this technique is not working well, interrupt their reading after longer sections of text.
- Ask students to continue to mark (e.g., underline or highlight) any problem areas in the text as they read and share what they marked at stop points further along in the text.

Recommendation 4: Stretch text

Provide students with opportunities to practice making sense of stretch text (i.e., challenging text) that will expose them to complex ideas and information.

Level of Evidence: Moderate

Recommendation 4: *Provide students with opportunities to practice making sense of stretch text (i.e., challenging text) that will expose them to complex ideas and information.*

How-to Step 1: *Prepare for the lesson by carefully selecting appropriate stretch texts, choosing points to stop for discussion and clarification, and identifying words to teach.*

How-to Step 2: *Provide significant support as the group works through a stretch text together.*

How-to Step 3: *After students demonstrate comfort with reading stretch texts with the group, provide students with electronic supports to use when independently reading stretch text to assist with pronunciation of difficult words and word meanings.*

How-to Step 1: *Prepare for the lesson by carefully selecting appropriate stretch texts, choosing points to stop for discussion and clarification, and identifying words to teach.*

- Consider texts that are at the upper range or somewhat above the upper range of students' independent reading levels.
- Sequence the stretch text passages so that the difficulty and passage length gradually increase.
- Choose texts related to topics students are studying in their subject-area classes when possible, rather than isolated passages or excerpts from the subject-area textbooks.
- Look for texts that are engaging and that discuss interesting ideas or perspectives.

How-to Step 1 (continued): *Prepare for the lesson by carefully selecting appropriate stretch texts, choosing points to stop for discussion and clarification, and identifying words to teach.*

- Before the lesson begins, read through the text to choose logical points to stop for group discussion.
- Also create a list of difficult multisyllabic words, proper nouns, and essential words to discuss before and during reading.



Example: Teacher preparing to read a short section from a grade-level text about noted novelist Louise Erdrich.

First excerpt: The teacher marks the following sections and words before beginning to read with the group. This is grade level material for the English language arts class.

Stop points and discussion starters:

- Stop after paragraph 1 – *What is this paragraph about?*
- Stop after paragraph 2 – *What was the purpose of the boarding schools for Native Americans?*
- Stop after paragraph 3 – *What happened in her novel LaRose that was disturbing?*
- Stop after paragraph 4 – *What are some positive aspects of her novels? What do you think the author means when describing people who fall in between being wise and thoughtless at the same time?*



Example (continued): Teacher preparing to read a short section from a grade-level text about noted novelist Louise Erdrich.

Proper nouns:

- Pulitzer Prize
- Louise Erdrich
- Ojibwe
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Native American

Multisyllabic words using previously taught word-reading skills:

- frequently
- reservation
- attended
- assimilate
- traditions

Essential words:

- novel
- reservation
- assimilate
- boarding school

How-to Step 2: *Provide significant support as the group works through a stretch text together.*

- Work through stretch texts as a group with teacher support, rather than assigning stretch texts to students to work on independently or with a partner.
- Before reading, help students understand that stretch text activities will be very difficult at times.
- Explain to them that all readers (including their teachers) read material that includes words that are difficult to read or understand, or about topics for which they lack relevant world knowledge.

How-to Step 2 (continued): *Provide significant support as the group works through a stretch text together.*

- Explain (and then remind them often) that, as in athletics or learning to play a musical instrument, readers need to challenge themselves to build their skills.
- Explain that the goal is to keep trying to make sense of challenging texts together, so students develop the habit of sticking with difficult passages.

How-to Step 3: After students demonstrate comfort with reading stretch texts with the group, provide students with electronic supports to use when independently reading stretch text to assist with pronunciation of difficult words and word meanings.

- Over time, students will demonstrate increased comfort in working with stretch texts.
- In addition to providing students with challenging text to grapple with in a supportive small-group setting, students can work with stretch texts during independent reading using electronic supports available on tablets, laptops, and other devices.
- Most of these devices include electronic dictionaries that can help students understand difficult words. Some devices may contain software that reminds students about their knowledge of word parts to help discern a word's meaning.



Obstacle: *Stretch text is just too frustrating for my students. They tend to give up far too easily.*

- Remind students that this challenging task is just one part of their lesson and that they will be guided and fully supported throughout the lesson.
- Begin with very brief 1- to 2-sentence stretch texts and then build up to longer selections.
- Also, consider engaging students prior to reading by reminding them that the text is very difficult and that they likely will not be able to read it with ease. Yet, they will see improvement with practice.

This presentation contains a few examples from the practice guide.

The full practice guide and supporting materials provide more details and are available on the What Works Clearinghouse website (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/29>).

Submit questions and requests via email to the WWC Help Desk at Contact.WWC@ed.gov.

Questions and Thanks!