A Crosswalk: Structured Literacy and Strategic Instruction Model (SIM™) Instructional Tools and Interventions

Purpose

The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning (KUCRL) has developed this crosswalk to assist educators in understanding the relationship between Structured Literacy and the elements and processes used when implementing the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM™). These comparisons demonstrate that some SIM instructional tools and interventions can be used to deliver structured literacy for adolescent learners. It is important to note that SIM was designed for adolescents who have gained reading proficiencies at the fourth-grade level yet still need to advance their reading skills to meet grade level content expectations.

Background on Structured Literacy

Structured Literacy is an instructional approach endorsed by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) and grounded in the Science of Reading. The term was coined by IDA in the 1990s to describe methods rooted in Orton-Gillingham-based programs and Multisensory Structured Language Education. The National Reading Panel Report (2000) identified effective methods for teaching reading, concluding that a combination of five pillars of reading are crucial: phonemic awareness, systematic phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Structured Literacy refers to both the content and principles of instruction, emphasizing explicit, systematic teaching of foundational skills such as phoneme awareness, decoding, spelling, and syntax, as well as higher-level literacy components like vocabulary, comprehension, and written expression. Instruction is diagnostic, cumulative, and multimodal, integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Structured Literacy is especially effective for students with dyslexia and other reading difficulties, as it addresses language processing weaknesses through direct teaching of language at all levels—from phonemes to discourse. The IDA's infomap "Structured Literacy: Grounded in the Science of Reading" helps clarify the distinction between Structured Literacy and the broader Science of Reading research base, and supports educators in delivering instruction that is purposeful, responsive, and aligned with evidence-based practices. In 2025, IDA published an updated definition of dyslexia (see the Resources table below for a link). For more information, visit https://dyslexiaida.org/structuredliteracy/.

Background on SIM

The Strategic Instruction Model is a comprehensive approach to adolescent literacy, including an evidence-based set of instructional tools and interventions that empower teachers and enable students to better succeed in school and beyond. Strategic schools and teachers select instructional tools and interventions to meet their student needs, and strategic students have options for matching an approach to a task. Since 1978, researchers from KUCRL have partnered with classroom teachers to design SIM instructional tools, materials, and interventions. The research-based components of these tools have been tested and approved by teachers to become evidence-based practices shown to be effective in varied school and classroom contexts. SIM includes two arms that work together to improve literacy: Learning Strategies (LS) and Content Enhancement Routines (CER). LS uses explicit and systematic instructional procedures. A prerequisite for Learning Strategy instruction is that students are reading at the fourth-grade level. Thus, it is assumed that students have mastered foundations reading skills that include phonemic awareness, basic phonics, and basic reading comprehension. This means that Learning Strategy Instruction builds upon these skills and does not provide direct, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness or basic phonics. CER instruction is designed to support content area literacy and access to higher order thinking for all students. CER implementation is supported by the SMARTER Instructional Cycle which promotes effective teaching and learning of critical content. Schools and teachers may implement a combination of LS and/or CER. SIM also includes two comprehensive reading programs, designed based on the science of reading: Fusion Reading (FR) and Xtreme Reading (XR). For more information, visit www.sim.ku.edu.

In summary, the structured literacy components are organized into two categories: evidence-based elements and evidence-based teaching practices. The Structured Literacy elements inform teachers WHAT to instruct, and the Structured Literacy teaching practices inform teachers HOW to instruct these elements. Meanwhile, SIM combines the evidence-based elements and teaching practices to make instruction effective and efficient for teachers and their students. SIM provides materials and methods to actualize what structured literacy promotes as the content and principles of instruction.

Structured Literacy and SIM

Structured Literacy Component	How might an educator use a SIM instructional tool to teach the given structured literacy component?
ELEMENTS	
Phonology: study of sound structure of spoken words **Phonemic Awareness:** ability to distinguish / segment / blend / manipulate sounds relevant to reading / spell	The Word Identification Strategy helps readers successfully decode and identify unknown words in reading materials. The strategy is based on the premise that most words in the English language can be pronounced by identifying prefixes, suffixes, and stems and by following three short syllabication rules. This reading strategy was designed for older readers to continue developing their phonics and phonemic awareness skills. The Word Identification Strategy can be taught as a stand-alone strategy or as part of the Xtreme Reading Program. The Bridging Strategy built into the Fusion Reading Program also instructs students on word identification and decoding as well as includes a review of sound-symbol association. With both of these reading strategies, these word level skills are taught to a level of automaticity and include fluency practice with expository and narrative text.
Sound -Symbol Association: learning the alphabetic principle--how to map phonemes to letters (graphemes) and vice versa	
Syllables: knowing the six syllable / vowel grapheme types helps reader associate vowel spellings with vowel sounds; syllable division rules help readers divide / decode unfamiliar words	
Morphology: a morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in language; studying the base elements and affixes helps readers decode and unlock the meanings of complex words	The Word Mapping Strategy is a generative morphemic analysis strategy. The Word Mapping Strategy includes a set of cognitive steps to help students learn how to predict the meaning of unknown words by identifying and knowing the meaning of prefixes, suffixes, and roots, and practicing predicting word meaning in the context of reading passages. The Word Mapping Strategy is integrated into KUCRL's Xtreme Reading Program. In KUCRL's Fusion Reading Program, there is a 7-step vocabulary strategy that instructs students in morphology. As another example, within the Vocabulary LINCing Routine or LINCS Vocabulary Strategy, a specific step calls upon students' phonemic awareness when they identify
Vocabulary: words students need to know for effective communication and learning (reading/writing)	

	a "reminding word" that sounds like their vocabulary word. Other CERs can be used to teach critical content, concepts, key words and terms.
Syntax: the set of principles that dictate the sequence and function of words in a sentence--includes grammar, sentence structure, and the mechanics of language.	The **Fundamentals in the Sentence Writing Strategy** and **Proficiency in the Sentence Writing Strategy** teach students the sequence and functions of words in a sentence, focused on the most important grammatical elements needed to write a variety of complete sentences. These two writing strategies help students recognize and write 14 sentence patterns within four types of sentences: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. The **Understanding Academic Language Strategy** is another Learning Strategy that helps students understand complex language structures found in academic textbooks by improving their understanding of how words and phrases are arranged to create well-formed sentences, the role that active and passive voice plays in comprehension, how connectives are used to signal relationships between ideas, and the importance of pronouns.
Semantics: instruction in the comprehension and appreciation of written language; concerned with meaning	There are Learning Strategies that support instruction in semantics and comprehension of varied text types. The **Self-Questioning Strategy** helps students create their own motivation for reading. They create questions in their minds, predict the answers to those questions, search for the answers to those questions as they read, and paraphrase the answers to themselves. There are two Learning Strategies that can be used separately or together to teach students to paraphrase text in order to generate summary statements with supporting details: **The Fundamentals of Paraphrasing and Summarizing Strategy** teaches students the fundamental skills they need to be able to identify and paraphrase main ideas and details. It contains lessons on paraphrasing words, phrases, and sentences, as well as lessons on identifying main ideas and details in paragraphs and short essays. The **Paraphrasing Strategy** helps students focus on the most important information in a passage, identify the main idea and details, and rephrase the content in their own words. The **Inference Strategy** helps students comprehend written passages and answer inferential questions (questions

	that are not answered directly in the text). The Visual Imagery Strategy is a reading comprehension strategy for creating mental movies of narrative passages. Students visualize the scenery, characters, and action and describe the scenes to themselves. All of these reading focused Learning Strategies are included in KUCRL's Xtreme Reading Program in a sequential and spiraled curriculum. KUCRL's Fusion Reading Program has different reading strategies that also instruct students in semantics: the Prediction Strategy and the Summarization Strategy. All Content Enhancement Routines can support instruction in semantics when they are used with text to support their development. The following examples highlight several CERs with especially strong connections to semantics instruction. Teachers use the Framing Routine to transform abstract main ideas and key topics into a concrete representation that helps students think about and talk about the key topic and essential related information. Teachers use the Clarifying Routine to focus on a topic and then explore related details and the topic's connection to critical concepts and ideas. This routine helps students master the meaning of targeted words and phrases. Teachers use the Survey Routine to construct an overview of a reading assignment when students are having difficulty reading and sorting out information from inconsiderate text. Teachers use the Concept Mastery Routine to identify characteristics of an example of a concept class that must be always, sometimes, and never present to fit in the concept class. New examples are explored to confirm understanding of a concept. Teachers use the Question Exploration Routine to help students understand a "critical question" and to arrive at a main idea answer. Students learn to break apart a large question into smaller, more manageable questions, answer those questions, arrive at the main idea answer, apply the main idea to the subject area or related issue and generalize the idea

Fluency: execution of multiple cognitive and language processes and whether oral or silent, is the simultaneous execution of rate, accuracy, and prosody.	Students practice reading aloud during the Word Identification Strategy. They first decode the words using the Rules of 2s and 3s and then read the grade level passage aloud to build fluency. For the Self-Questioning Strategy, the Paraphrasing Strategy, the Inference Strategy, and the Visual Imagery Strategy, teachers can choose to have students complete their practice on grade level passages orally. This helps build fluency of both the printed word and strategy use. In the Xtreme Reading Program and the Fusion Reading Program, students work with a partner to read a passage aloud and provide feedback to each other on strategy use. They then each take turns re-reading their section additional times and record their reading rate.
TEACHING PRINCIPLES	
Systematic & Cumulative: Systematic means the organization of material follows the logical order of language. The sequence begins with the easiest and most basic concepts and elements and progresses methodically to the more difficult. Cumulative means each step is based on concepts previously taught.	Individual Learning Strategies (LS) can be taught in the sequence needed for learners (e.g., Visual Imagery to Self-Questioning to Paraphrasing to Inference). Within LS instruction, as part of the *Eight Stages of Instruction*, the *Describe Stage* includes students setting personalized learning goals; *Controlled Practice & Feedback* and *Advance Practice & Feedback Stages* use the "I do, we do, you do" process and involve students using the strategy with increasingly difficult tasks and scaffolded reading passages. Content Enhancement Routines (CER) reduce cognitive load through visual representation of critical concepts, topics, and details. "Cue-Do-Review" instructional sequence prompts a supportive learning experience for students; "I do, we do, you do" approach can be used to move CER use from whole class construction to independent student strategy use.

Explicit: direct teaching of concepts with continuous student-teacher interaction and does not assume students can deduce concepts.	Stages of instruction built into all Learning Strategies use elements of explicit instruction delivery: clarity of language and purpose, reduction of cognitive load with scaffolded approach, frequent and varied student responses, frequent affirmative and corrective feedback, and deliberate activities for generalization of strategy to practical uses. All Learning Strategies include mnemonics to help students remember and make automatic the cognitive steps of the strategy (e.g., RAP, MAPS, INFER). The Cue-Do-Review instructional sequence built into all Content Enhancement Routines (CER) prompts a supportive learning experience for students; "I do, we do, you do" approach can be used to move CER use from whole class construction to independent student strategy use.
Diagnostic: Individualizing instruction (even within groups) based on careful and continuous assessment, both informal (e.g., observation) and formal (e.g., with standardized measures). Content must be mastered to the degree of automaticity needed to free attention and cognitive resources for comprehension and oral/written expression.	Within Learning Strategy instruction, as part of the *Eight Stages of Instruction*, the *Pre-test & Make Commitments* stage of instruction evaluates student skills in relation to grade level curricular demands. Purposeful selection of LS aligns with needed skills and incorporates student awareness of strengths and needs. Progress is monitored throughout instruction not only by teachers but also by students when they record their scores on a progress chart. Mastery learning includes multiple opportunities for formative assessment with these stages of instruction: *Verbal Practice, Controlled Practice & Feedback, Advance Practice & Feedback, Pre-/Post-test & Make Commitments, and Generalization*. *Controlled Practice & Feedback* and *Advance Practice & Feedback Stages* involve students using the strategy with increasingly difficult tasks and scaffolded reading passages. Descriptive, targeted feedback including additional modeling and goal setting is provided in relation to meeting general education learning expectations. SMARTER Instructional Cycle accompanies the use of Content Enhancement Routines, which includes *Shaping critical questions* based on a review of standards and student performance data to plan instruction and *Analyze learning demands* step to consider how content might be difficult, made apparent, and measured. The

	subsequent steps in the cycle foster using data to make instructional decisions and evaluating those decisions in a recursive way to make new adjustments: *Reaching enhancement decisions*; *Teaching for strategic learning; Evaluating learning,* and *Revisiting learning* outcomes. The "Do" aspect of the Cue-Do-Review instructional sequence (as part of all CERs) is co-constructed learning with students which allows for teachers to adjust instruction and clear up misconceptions based on verbal and written data contributed by their students. To note, the A & R steps of SMARTER might also lead teachers to select a Learning Strategy to teach to their students.

References & Resources:

What is Structured Literacy?	https://dyslexiaida.org/structuredliteracy/
Structured Literacy Infographic	https://dyslexialibrary.org/structured-literacy-education-infographic/
2025 Dyslexia Definition	https://dyslexiaida.org/2025-dyslexia-definition-project/
Dyslexia Library	https://dyslexialibrary.org/
International Dyslexia Association	https://dyslexiaida.org/
National Reading Panel Report 2000	https://www.thereadingleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NRP-Report.pdf
The Reading League	https://www.thereadingleague.org/