

White Paper

**Providing Differentiated Reading Instruction
to Meet the Individual Needs of Students**

Adria F. Klein, Ph.D

The first step in planning effective instruction is finding texts that match the reading level and conceptual levels of the students you will be teaching.

Allington (2005)

Differentiated reading instruction can no longer be seen as an intervention or as a remedial measure; it's the way to teach all students.

Ivey (2000; p. 42)

Making a difference means making it different.

International Reading Association
(2000; position statement)

One-size instruction never fit anyone. It is time to discard old patterns and redesign reading instruction with diverse students in mind.

Ivey (2000; p. 42)

Instructional programs and materials used by a state educational agency or school district must focus on the five key areas that scientifically based reading research has identified as essential components of reading instruction—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

United States Department
of Education (2002)

This paper discusses how to make developmentally appropriate reading resources available in every classroom so teachers can meet the unique needs of all K–6 students.

The population of students making up all schools, particularly urban classrooms, has grown increasingly diverse over the past decade, making the goal of meeting each child's instructional needs more and more challenging. For teachers charged with providing the best instruction to this diverse student population, the lack of developmentally appropriate resources hinders their efforts to improve reading performance and meet *Put Reading First* requirements.

When students are spread over a range of developmental levels, a one-size-fits-all approach to instruction cannot meet the needs of the students. The solution is a comprehensive collection of resources developed to implement best practices as defined by research—a collection that provides teachers easy and ready access to the toolbox of instructional tools they need to meet the needs of each and every student.

The Challenges of Using Differentiated Instruction to Meet Reading Standards

Schools in the business of educating children and preparing them for a successful, self-sustaining future are faced with the costly challenge of leaving no child behind. The multi-faceted dimensions of reading instruction require that teachers address certain foundational components of reading. These include alphabet recognition, phonological awareness, high-frequency word recognition, and phonics. While foundational skills are being mastered, attention begins to shift to the skills and strategies of fluency, vocabulary, and most importantly, comprehension. It is unreasonable to expect that all children in the typical classroom will need the same level of instruction in any one of these skill areas. And while teachers acknowledge that different children learn in different ways and at different rates, we should not lose sight of the fact that there are certain skills all children need to know.

Reading First

Building a Foundation

Alphabetic Knowledge

Alphabet instruction involves teaching the naming, recognition, and formation of the 26 uppercase and lowercase letter symbols used to form every word in the English language.

In addition to phonemic awareness, many reading experts say that recognition of the letters of the alphabet is one of the most important indicators of early reading success (Adams, 1990).

Starting at preschool and kindergarten, schools should help students learn the names and shapes of letters. Incorporating writing/printing into letter instruction is a powerful means of developing letter recognition. Using letter/keyword/picture displays when introducing letters is an effective strategy (Adams, 1990).

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness addresses the sounds of language. It is not about teaching the symbols that represent sounds, but rather it is about teaching the sounds alone. Instruction in phonological awareness includes awareness of sound at word, rhyme, syllable, and phoneme levels. It is one of the most important, if not the most important, early indicators of reading success (Stanovich, 1996).

The 2000 National Reading Panel report focuses on one component of phonological awareness—phonemic awareness. Effective teaching strategies for phonemic awareness include teaching students to identify a particular sound in a word; recognize the same sound in different words; recognize one word that begins or ends with a different sound from a group of three or four words; segment and blend the sounds in a word; and manipulate sounds in a word through substitution, addition, and deletion of other sounds.

Phonemic awareness is one of the best predictors of how well children will learn how to read.
Ehri (2001)

Phonemic Awareness Skills for Effective Reading Instruction	
Phoneme Skill	Definition
Isolation	recognizing individual sounds
Identity	recognizing same sound in multiple words
Categorization	identifying word with odd (different) sound in three- to four-word sequence
Blending	listening to phoneme sequence
Segmentation	physically breaking words into phonemes
Manipulation	adding/deleting phonemes to create new words

Phonemic awareness helps students learn to read and spell. The most effective instruction quickly moves the student from awareness of a particular sound to an association of that sound with a letter symbol. Once letter symbols are introduced, students should be able to manipulate the sounds within words by using their knowledge of sound/symbol relationships.

Systematic phonics instruction is a valuable and essential part of a successful classroom reading program.

National Institute of Child Health
and Human Development,
National Reading Panel (2000)

High-Frequency Words

By some accounts, three words (*I, the, and a*) make up 10% of all words read, while 100 words make up 50% of all words read. Many of these words, such as *which, their, and would*, are not easily sounded out or decoded and cannot be taught with pictures. Mastering a repertoire of high-frequency words accelerates fluent and meaningful reading and helps students learn other words that contain similar parts (Fry, 2000).

High-frequency-word instruction involves multiple exposures to these words. Presenting these words in meaningful context, associating them with other words, and presenting them in a variety of contexts are effective instructional practices.

Phonics

From its meta-analysis of reading research studies, the National Reading Panel concluded that systematic phonics instruction brought about the greatest improvements in reading ability. The findings led to recommendations that explicit and systematic phonics instruction be an essential part of every classroom reading program.

Phonics is a natural follow-up to phonemic awareness instruction. Teaching children the graphemes (letters) associated with the phonemes (sound units) they have learned enables children to decode printed words. Research shows that the most effective phonics instruction is synthetic phonics, which teaches a child to convert letters into sounds and blend the various sounds needed to make words (White, 2005; pp. 238–239). This instruction should begin in kindergarten and, for most readers, continue for two to three years. Most phonics instruction should be direct, focused, and brief—normally about 20 minutes each day.

Building Understanding

Fluency

Fluency has two parts—reading rate and reading expression (prosody). Research suggests that children who read haltingly expend so much energy on word naming that little energy is left for comprehension. The work of many researchers, including S. Samuels, S. Stahl, and T. Rasinski, has shown that repeated practice with familiar reading passages at a child's independent reading level can improve fluency and lead to improved comprehension.

Fluency is important because it exerts an important influence on comprehension; that is, to experience good comprehension the reader must be able to identify words quickly and easily.

Samuels (2002)

Specific word instruction, or teaching individual words, can deepen students' knowledge of word meaning. In-depth knowledge of word meanings can help students understand what they are hearing or learning.
Snow (2002; p. 63)

Comprehending is a complicated process. It is one of the most important skills for students to develop if they are to become successful and productive adults.
Pardo (2004; p. 278)

Reading comprehension strategies can be acquired independently (informally) and through direct instruction (formally).
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development,
National Reading Panel (2000)

Vocabulary

If children do not know what words mean, all the decoding in the world will not help them reach the ultimate goal of understanding what they read. Children who can map words to their meanings of the words are much more likely to comprehend what they read. Building word knowledge, which is demonstrated through comprehension, is a critical element to reading success. While much vocabulary acquisition comes from incidental learning, research has shown that instructional strategies, such as repeated exposure to words, pre-teaching vocabulary, and using context clues, are also effective—especially when these strategies are used in combination. Most students are capable of learning eight to 10 new words a week, according to the National Institute of Literacy. The Institute recommends focusing on three types of words as described in the table below.

Key Word Types to Teach Vocabulary	
Important Words	words important to understanding a concept or text
Useful Words	words students are likely to encounter again and again; for example, <i>revolve</i> rather than <i>gyrate</i>
Difficult Words	words that challenge, such as those with multiple meaning and idiomatic expressions

Comprehension

Comprehension is the overall goal of all reading instruction. Without comprehension, we cannot extract meaning from the printed word, and we cannot derive knowledge or pleasure from what we read. Comprehension is best taught, practiced, and enhanced when children encounter reading materials at their developmental or instructional level, that is, materials that are not frustratingly difficult but are sufficiently challenging. Using developmentally appropriate materials, comprehension instruction that is direct and explicit and that focuses on a few fundamental reading strategies, can lead to improved reading performance.

Teacher-guided use of eight cognitive comprehension strategies, in combination, is the most effective approach to building comprehension skills, according to the National Reading Panel. The goal is to scaffold instruction in a gradual release-of-responsibility model until the reader is able to use these strategies without the assistance of a teacher (Pearson and Gallagher, 1983). The National Reading Panel concluded in its research analysis that cognitive-strategy instruction results in significant gains in reading comprehension.

Strategies and Methods for Teaching Reading Comprehension	
Strategies/Methods	Description
Monitoring understanding	Monitoring understanding means being an active, thoughtful reader. Readers are aware of their thought processes and their use of reading strategies.
Analyzing story structure	Students understand story elements, such as sequence, setting, characters, and events.
Answering questions	Teachers ask questions to guide student understanding.
Generating questions	Students generate their own questions regarding who, what, where, when, why, and how.
Summarizing	Students identify main ideas and relevant details of text.
Incorporating multiple strategies	Teachers model how to apply a combination of strategies to extract meaning from text.
Employing cooperative grouping	Students work together learning and using comprehension strategies.
Using graphic organizers	Students draw meaning and relationships to represent elements and ideas embedded within the text.

Assessment

Assessment plays a critical role in every school's reading instruction. Benchmark assessments should be used to establish a baseline for determining student progress and informing teachers of areas of need in differentiated instruction. These benchmark assessments should evaluate each child's proficiency on both skills and strategies. Ongoing assessment to monitor student progress and adjust instruction as needed is a key component to improved reading performance.

An Affordable Option for Differentiated Instruction Resources

An online collection of reading resources targeting the skills and strategies cited above and that could be delivered 24/7 over a high-speed Internet connection would provide any English language teacher in the world with instant access to a virtual toolbox of developmentally appropriate resources. These resources could be organized and easily retrieved using search features and a navigational interface that put needed resources a mouse click away. Teachers could download what they need and make as many copies as they need.

Studies clearly indicate that as time spent reading at appropriate levels increases, reading performance improves. If teachers could print everything required to meet each student's needs with no cost attached to printing extra resources, students could take ownership of books and other instructional materials. Ownership of books would provide students additional opportunities for independent practice.

From year to year, teachers cannot anticipate each student's instructional needs. An online collection of resources would eliminate the necessity of ordering and storing print resources, which often go unused and gather dust on classroom and bookroom shelves until a need arises.

Online delivery of educational resources is much more affordable because teachers pay for access, not the actual product delivered to their classrooms in cartons. Teachers access only what they need.

Online resources, particularly books on science and social studies, can be updated instantly so teachers have access to the most current information. Students don't have to wait for the next book adoption cycle to get an updated book on topics such as changes in the political landscape or new discoveries about the solar system.

Online resource delivery also lends itself to building a community of users who can provide instant feedback to the resource developer, thus informing the developer of additional resource needs and revisions to existing resources.

Furthermore, online materials can stay current with the latest instructional research findings. As effective classroom strategies are confirmed through efficacy studies, resources that support these strategies can be added to the existing collection of instructional materials and delivered immediately to the classroom teacher.

Instructional Scenarios

The instructional possibilities created by an online, comprehensive collection of research-based reading resources are endless. Two school settings offer examples of the challenges today's educators face and how these challenges could be addressed with online delivery of learning resources.

A Self-Contained Classroom

A typical classroom contains students spanning three to four grade levels of reading ability, especially after 2nd grade. Some students need basic instruction in decoding words; others have the necessary decoding skills but lack the vocabulary background, fluency, and comprehension strategies to understand what they are reading. Students often come from homes where English is not the primary language. Students also possess varying degrees of vocabulary awareness, and some have learning disabilities. The needs of these students can only be met by analyzing their strengths and weaknesses then using developmentally appropriate resources for targeted and differentiated instruction. With online, instant access to a vast array of learning resources written for various developmental levels, teachers are better equipped to meet the diverse learning needs that are found in most classrooms.

Classroom Pullouts

Many schools address the special needs of certain students in reading intervention, special education, and English Language Learner pullout settings where instruction is delivered by an educator with specialized training to meet the needs of these students. These educators need developmentally appropriate learning resources aligned with their students' needs. With online instant access to a vast array of learning resources written for various developmental levels, educators are better equipped to target the specific needs of each child being served.



The Learning A-Z Solution

Learning A-Z has designed a suite of online reading resources delivered by its various websites. Its comprehensive collection of Web-based learning resources helps teachers differentiate instruction, thus improving student reading performance. These website resources are created to mirror best practices as defined by years of classroom research and as described in the National Reading Panel's 2000 report. The websites are as follows:

	 Reading A-Z	 Raz-Kids	 Vocabulary A-Z	 Writing A-Z
Phonological Awareness	✓	✓		
Phonics	✓			
Fluency	✓	✓	✓	
Comprehension	✓	✓	✓	
General Vocabulary	✓	✓	✓	
Content Area Vocabulary	✓	✓	✓	
High-Frequency Words	✓	✓		
Alphabet	✓			
Process Writing				✓
Writing Skills				✓

ReadingA-Z.com

Teachers simply do not have enough books to address the individual needs of every student throughout the school year. ReadingA-Z.com provides teachers with more than 3,000 books, including a collection of about 2,500 leveled readers written to 29 levels of reading difficulty and available in English, Spanish, French, British English, Polish, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. Both fact and fiction books with a range of genres and a variety of text types are offered. The website also provides lessons and worksheets with each book, as well as a complete phonics program, high-frequency word books, poetry resources, fluency passages, reader's theater scripts, alphabet resources, assessments, and much more. This website is dynamic with new resources added monthly and existing resources updated as appropriate.

The educational award-winning Reading A-Z website is used by thousands of teachers in classrooms around the world. The website enables educators to instantly download and print reading resources needed to meet the instructional needs of all children, whether in a self-contained classroom or a pullout setting.



Reading A-Z Resources			
Alphabet	Phonological Awareness	Phonics	
Frieze Cards	Lessons	Lessons	
Flash Cards	Flash Cards	Flash Cards	
Chants	Poetry Books	Decodable Books	
Letter Formation Sheets	Read-Aloud Books	Read-Aloud Books	
Letter Books	Sound/Symbol Books	Sound/Symbol Books	
Assessments	Worksheets	Worksheets	
	Assessments	Assessments	
High-Frequency Words	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension
Flash Cards	Leveled Fluency Passages	Vocabulary Books	Leveled Books
Rhebus (High-Frequency Word) Books	Reader's Theater Scripts	Word Sorting Activities	Guided Reading Lessons
Vocabulary Books	Leveled Books	High-Frequency Word Books	Comprehension Quizzes
	Guided Reading Lessons	Flash Cards	Worksheets
	High-Frequency Word Books	Wordless Books	Retelling Rubrics
	Vocabulary Books	Humor Books	Graphic Organizers
	Graphic Organizers	Graphic Organizers	Benchmark Books and Running Records

Raz-Kids.com

Teachers simply do not have time to model fluent reading for every child. This website provides developing readers with the opportunity to go online and listen to, read, and record themselves reading books written at 29 levels of difficulty. After reading a book, students can take an interactive quiz to check their comprehension. Teachers have the option of building a roster of students, making student-specific assignments, and tracking each reader's progress, or opening up a bookroom to give students free access to all books.

The Raz-Kids website allows students to independently hear fluent reading modeled, practice reading skills, and check their comprehension. Teachers are then freed up to work strategically with small groups of students, while students using Raz-Kids gain important practice working independently at computer stations in the classroom or at home. New books and features are added to this website regularly.

VocabularyA-Z.com

Educators can generate customized vocabulary lessons by accessing VocabularyA-Z.com and selecting up to 12 words per lesson from thousands of words found on the website. Words are organized into word function and content area categories. Teachers can download and print lesson resources for a week's worth of instruction. Lesson resources include context clue sentences, graphic organizers, word analogies, cloze sentences, games, puzzles, assessments, and more. New words and word categories are added regularly. Teachers have the ability to select words that match the themes and objectives of their weekly instruction and even customize the lessons according to the developmental levels of their students. This award-winning vocabulary lesson creator is a definite time saver for teachers.

WritingA-Z.com

Writing goes hand in hand with reading, and like reading instruction, writing instruction varies according to each student's developmental level. WritingA-Z.com provides lessons for many writing genre/types and writing skills as well as a collection of writing tools/aids to assist students with their writing. The lesson tips and resources span four developmental levels, making it possible to deliver a single lesson that is differentiated by student ability. New resources and lessons are added to the website regularly. A teacher can easily select and download a lesson that aligns with classroom reading instruction and with the students' writing needs.

To learn more about Learning A–Z's website resources, visit:

www.readinga-z.com

www.vocabularya-z.com

www.raz-kids.com

www.writinga-z.com

Email: sales@learninga-z.com

The Solution Is Just a Click Away

For teachers needing a rich collection of developmentally appropriate resources to differentiate instruction and target the instructional needs of each child, Learning A–Z's suite of reading resource websites is both a time saver and a performance enabler. Learning A–Z is changing the way educators approach student instruction by providing around-the-clock instant access to teaching tools at an affordable price, thus removing a major obstacle to differentiated instruction.

Adria F. Klein received her Ph.D. in the major areas of Reading, and English as a Second Language from the University of New Mexico. Dr. Klein is a Professor Emeritus of Reading Education at California State University, San Bernardino. She has written a number of professional books and articles on writing instruction, reading strategies, intervention, and reader's theater as well as many children's books. She served as President of the California Reading Association and served on the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association from 1997 to 2000.

Learning A–Z Features/Benefits

Affordable

Learning A–Z websites are offered to individual teachers, schools, and school districts through an annual subscription. The classroom subscription price goes down as the size of the buying unit goes up. The company prices its websites so that every teacher/classroom can afford access.

Accessible

A username and password and an Internet connection give each registered user instant access 24/7 to thousands of reading instruction resources.

Comprehensive

With thousands of leveled books and lessons for reading, writing, and vocabulary instruction, teachers have at their fingertips everything they need to teach reading and writing to all of their students.

Dynamic

New materials and features are added to the websites on a regular basis. Books, lessons, worksheets, and other resources are updated regularly for topicality as well as best practices and latest instructional methods.

Customizable

From developmentally appropriate books to tutor packets targeting specific skill areas to vocabulary lessons matching classroom topics to leveled writing lessons, teachers can find whatever they need to fit their instruction style and diverse students' needs.

Time-Saving

No disorganized or shared bookrooms, no outdated filing cabinets, no tattered blacklines, these websites organize thousands of easily searchable materials and deliver them to teachers' desktops when they need them.

References

- Adams, M. J. (1990). *Beginning to read: thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Allington, R. L. (2005). *Five missing pillars of scientific reading instruction*. Proceedings of the 14th European Conference on Reading. Zagreb, Croatia. Retrieved February 15, 2007 from <http://teachersread.net/pdf/FivePillars.pdf>.
- Beck, I., McKeown, M., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Ehri, L. C., Nunes, S. R., Willows, D. M., Schuster, B. V., Yaghoub-Zadeh, Z., & Shanahan, T. (2001). Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to read: Evidence from the National Reading Panel's meta-analysis. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36(3), 250-287.
- Fry, E. B., Kress, J. E., & Fountoukidis, D. L. (2000). *The reading teacher's book of lists*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- International Reading Association. (2000). *International Reading Association position statement*. Retrieved February 15, 2007 from <http://www.reading.org/resources/issues/positions.html>.
- Ivey, G. (2000). Redesigning reading instruction. *Educational Leadership*, 58(1), 42-45.
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (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* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Pardo, L. S. (2004). What every teacher needs to know about comprehension. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(3), 272-280.
- Pearson, D. P. & Gallagher, M. (1983). The instruction of reading comprehension. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 8, 317-344.
- Put reading first*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.
- Samuels, S. J. (2002). Reading fluency: Its development and assessment. In A. E. Farstrup and S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction*. Newark: International Reading Association.
- Snow, C. (2002). *Reading for understanding: Toward an R&D program in reading comprehension*. Santa Monica: RAND.
- Stanovich, K. E. (1996). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21, 360-407.
- United States Department of Education. (2002). *Guidance for the Reading First program*. Retrieved February 15, 2007 from <http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/legislation.html>.
- White, T. G. (2005). Effects of systematic and strategic analogy-based phonics on grade 2 students' word reading and reading comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 40, 234-255.