

# Shifting to Structured Literacy Instruction:

**An Informed Framework for  
Comprehension Instruction**



Nancy Hennessy, M.Ed.

January 25, 2021

# Basis of Effective Instruction

Successful literacy instruction and interventions... provide a strong core of highly explicit, systematic teaching of foundational skills such as decoding and spelling skills, as well as explicit teaching of other important components of literacy such as vocabulary, comprehension, and writing.

Fletcher et al., 2018; Gersten et al., 2008; Graham et al., 2012; Torgesen, 2004

*Structured Literacy*

# The Science of Reading

THE MANY STRANDS THAT ARE WOVEN INTO SKILLED READING

**LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION**

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

VOCABULARY

LANGUAGE

VE

LITERACY/PR

**PRINTED**

PHONOLOG

**The Simple View**

Gough & Tunmer, 1986

**Decoding x Linguistic  
Comprehension**

=

**Reading Comprehension**

**SKILLED READING:**

fluent execution &  
coordination of text  
comprehension and  
word recognition.

DECODING

SIGHT RECOGNITION

increasingly  
automatic

**TIME**

Scarborough, 2001 Used with Permission

# The Language-Reading Comprehension Connection

*Expert teaching of reading and writing is only possible when the teacher knows not just the meanings conveyed by language, but how language itself works.*

Moats, 2010



*...reading comprehension is not a single entity that can be explained by a unified cognitive model. Instead, it is the orchestrated product of a set of linguistic and cognitive processes operating on text and interacting with background knowledge, features of the text, and the purpose and goals of the reading situation.*

Castles, A., Rastle, K., & Nation, K., 2018

## Process or Product?

*The products of comprehension are indicators of what the reader knows and understands after reading is completed, whereas the processes of comprehension are those cognitive activities by which the reader arrives at those products.*

*Rapp et al, 2010*



# Products



Antonio-first grade  
*Velveteen Rabbit*  
**What do you think this means:  
“When a child loves you for a  
long, long time, not just to  
play with, but REALLY loves  
you, then you become Real.”**

Kayla-third grade  
*Mystery of the Tattooed Mummy*  
**Why were the archaeologists surprised  
when they discovered the mummy?**

Matt-fifth grade  
*Tuck Everlasting*  
**Would you want to be immortal?  
Why or why not?**



Lily-ninth grade  
*Animal Farm*  
**In what ways, does this  
fable serve as a condemnation  
of Soviet Communism?**



## Process or Product?

*The products of comprehension are indicators of what the reader knows and understands after reading is completed, whereas the processes of comprehension are those cognitive activities by which the reader arrives at those products.*

*Rapp et al, 2010*

## LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE  
(facts, concepts, etc.)

VOCABULARY  
(breadth, precision, links, etc.)

LANGUAGE STRUCTURES  
(syntax, semantics, etc.)

VERBAL REASONING  
(inference, metaphor, etc.)

LITERACY KNOWLEDGE  
(print concepts, genres, etc.)

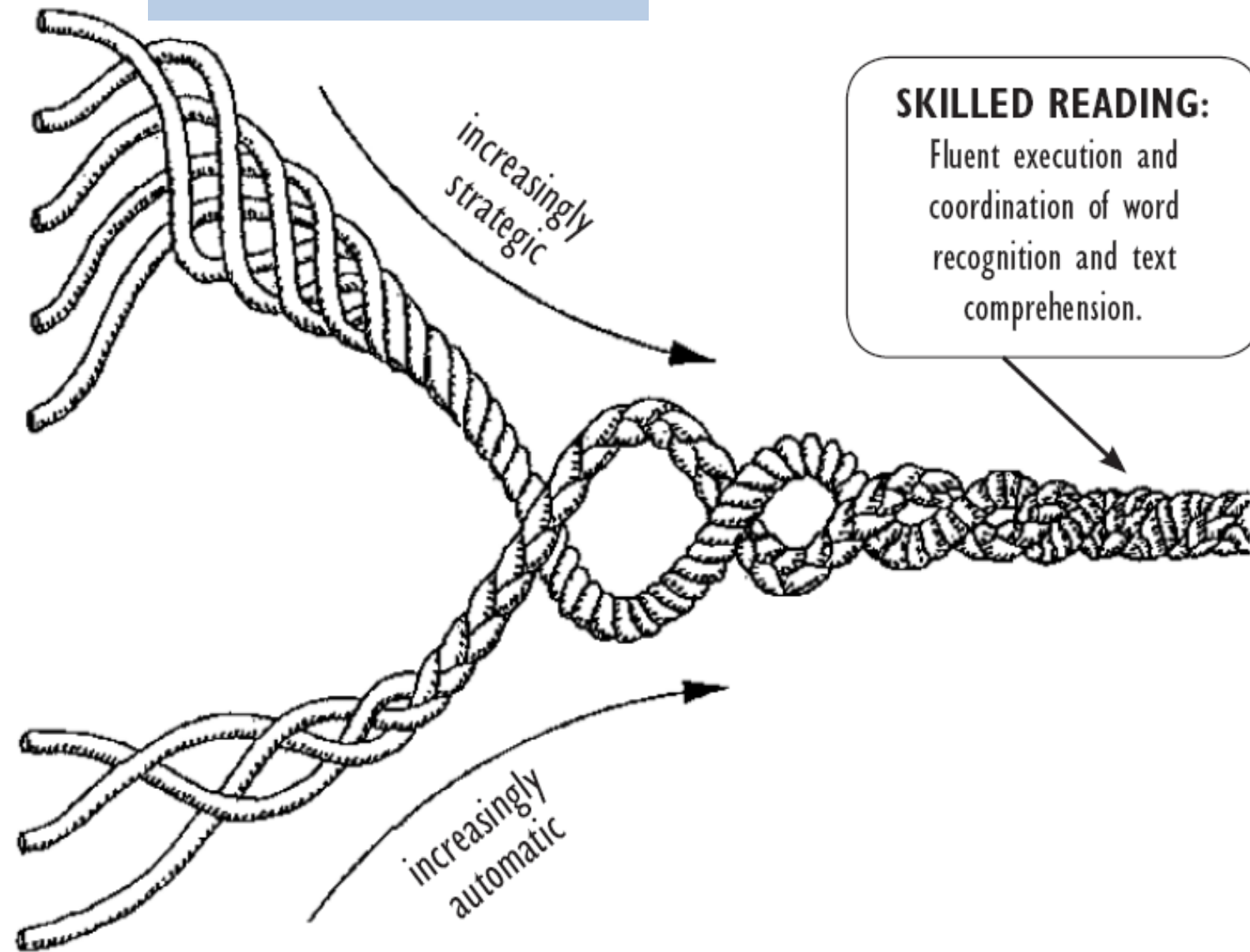
## WORD RECOGNITION

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS  
(syllables, phonemes, etc.)

DECODING (alphabetic principle,  
spelling-sound correspondences)

SIGHT RECOGNITION  
(of familiar words)

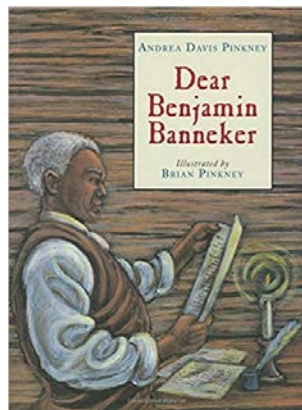
# Processes



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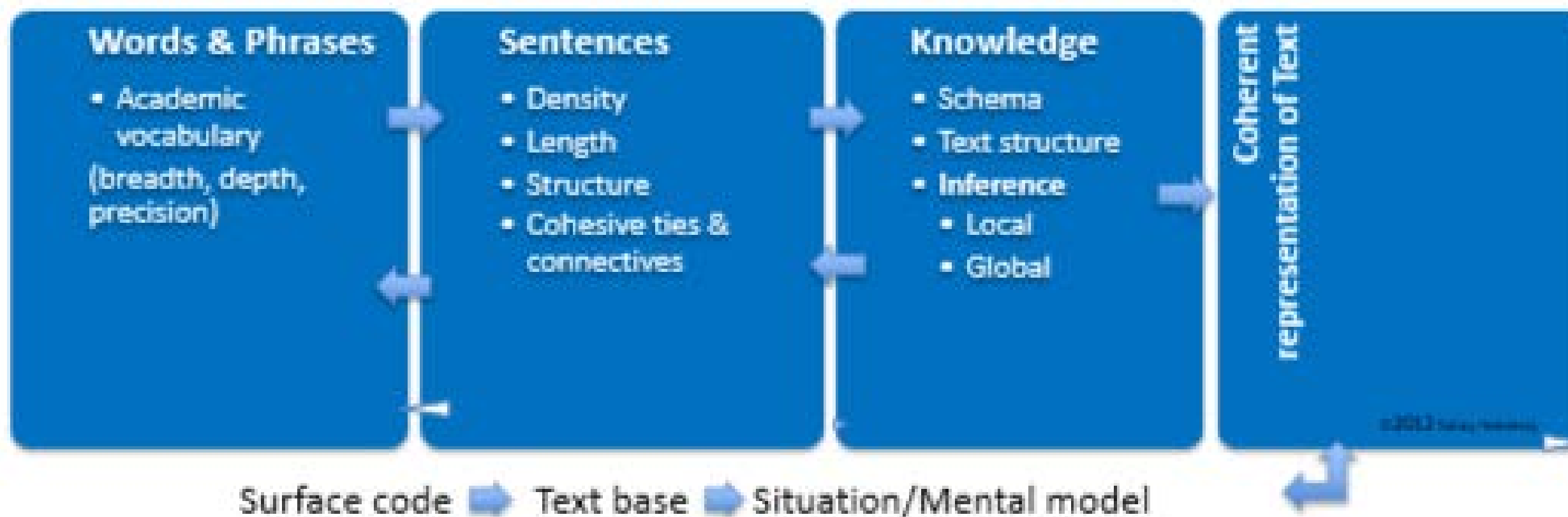
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# Levels of language processing...

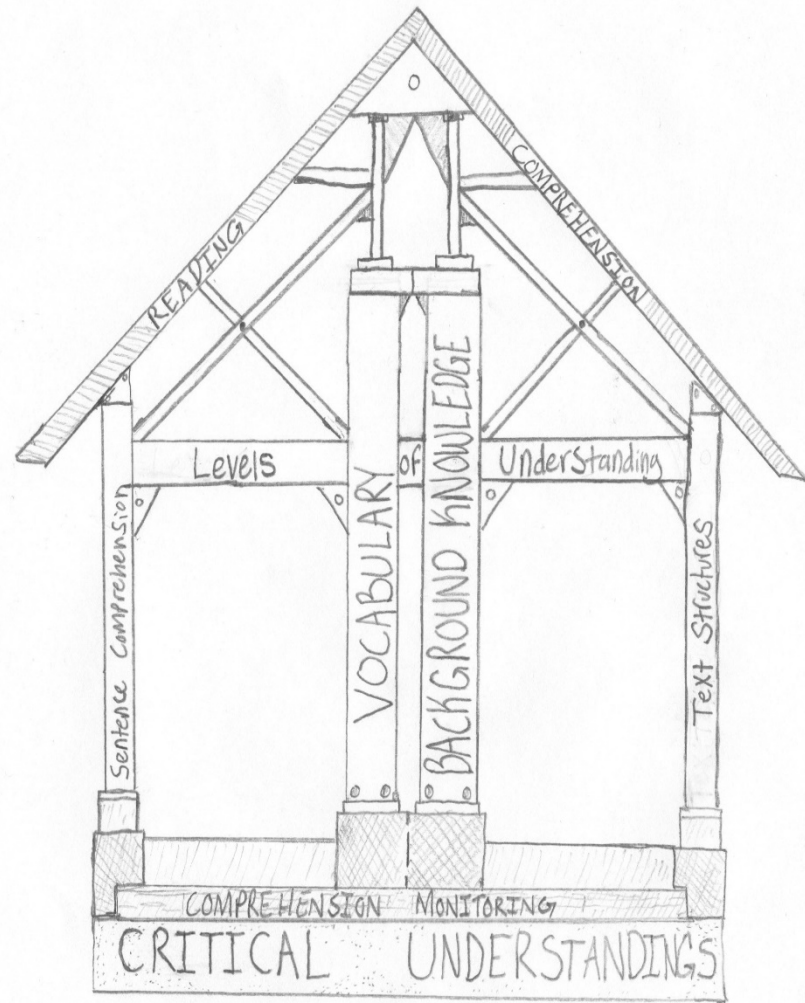
Based on Oakhill & Cain, 2007



# The Research to Practice Connection



# Constructing the Comprehension House



**A Structured Approach to  
Reading Comprehension Instruction**

**A Blueprint  
Based in the Science  
Literacy & Content Goals  
Purposeful Readings  
Evidence Based Strategies & Activities**

Hennessy, 2020

Will Wagner 01/01/2020

# Blueprint for Comprehension Instruction

## **PREPARING FOR INSTRUCTION** **CRITICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF TEXT**

What do you want students to know and understand after reading the text? What are the critical concepts and understandings—big ideas you want your students to acquire? What texts will support these understandings?

## **PURPOSE FOR READING TEXT**

What are the content instructional goals and objectives?  
What are the literacy instructional goals and objectives?

## **TEXT READING** **VOCABULARY**

Which words will your students need to know? Which are worth knowing?  
Which ones will you intentionally target and directly teach? Which ones will you incidentally-on-purpose teach? How, when?  
Which words will you purposefully discuss and incorporate into expressive language activities?  
How and when will you teach and foster the use of independent word learning strategies?

## **LANGUAGE STRUCTURES** **(phrases, clauses, sentence comprehension)**

Are there phrases, clauses, and sentence structures that may be difficult for your students?  
How and when will you directly teach sentence comprehension? How and when will you teach students to work with challenging sentences?  
How will you facilitate the integration of ideas within and between sentences, e.g., the use of cohesive ties and connectives? How and when will you teach students to work with these?

## **KNOWLEDGE** • **Text structure** • **Background knowledge**

How is the text organized? How and when will you directly teach students the purpose, features, and signal words of different genres? How will you teach students to use the structure to understand purpose? To organize and express their understanding?  
What background knowledge is critical to understanding the text? How and when will you teach students to access and build their knowledge and integrate it with the text?

## **LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING AND INFERENCE**

How will you teach students to construct meaning at different levels of understanding, including the surface code, textbase, and mental model of text? How will you directly teach students to use inference to integrate ideas and connect background knowledge to the text?  
How will you support your students' deep comprehension of text?

## **EXPRESSION OF UNDERSTANDING**

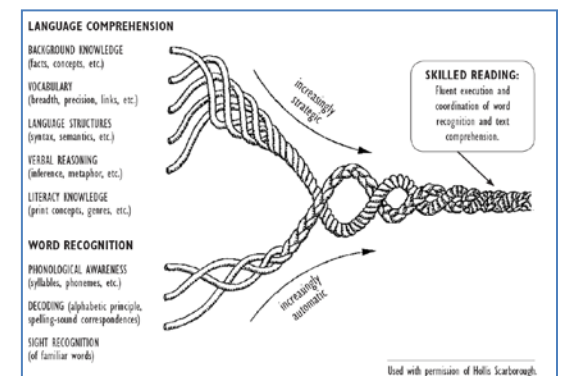
What strategies and activities will you use for students to demonstrate understanding at different levels during and after reading?  
How will you support their oral and written expression of understanding?





# An Informed Framework- The Blueprint

*An framework, based in the science, designed to guide and structure support the educator as he/she identifies learning goals, sets purpose, organizes instruction, selects instructional strategies and activities, delivers effective instruction, monitors students' progress and adjusts accordingly.*



# Deeper Dive

- ✓ Revisit the components of Reading Comprehension Blueprint.
- ✓ Consider the role of enduring understandings, purposeful texts and content and literacy goals and evidenced based strategies in comprehension instruction.
- ✓ Q & A

# Shifting to Structured Literacy Instruction:

## The Critical Role of Vocabulary Instruction



Nancy Hennessy, M.Ed.

March 15, 2021

*Words are not just words.  
They are the nexus—the interface—  
between communication and thought.  
When we read, it is through words  
that we build, refine, and modify our knowledge.  
What makes vocabulary valuable and important  
is not the words themselves  
so much as the understandings they afford.*

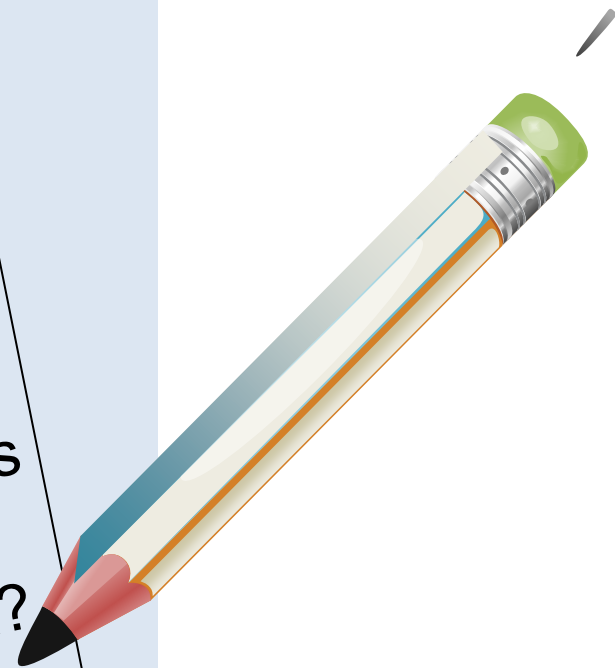
Adams, 2009

# Today

What evidence supports the vocabulary-comprehension connection?

How can we define and describe vocabulary?

What are the components of an informed instructional framework?



# Language Comprehension

## LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

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(facts, concepts, etc.)

VOCABULARY  
(breadth, precision, links, etc.)

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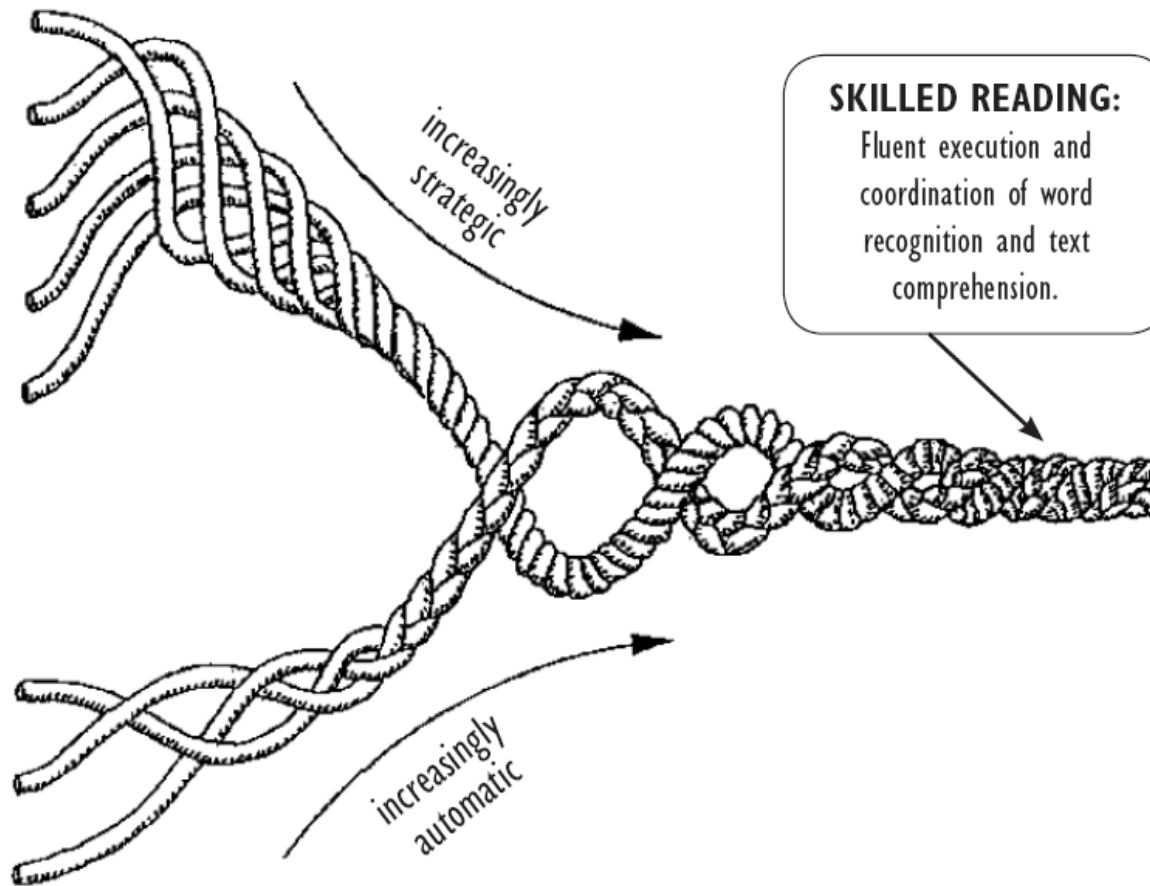
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## WORD RECOGNITION

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS  
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DECODING (alphabetic principle,  
spelling-sound correspondences)

SIGHT RECOGNITION  
(of familiar words)



### SKILLED READING:

Fluent execution and  
coordination of word  
recognition and text  
comprehension.

*Making meaning is dependent on the ability to work with the words, their meaning at the word, and sentence level.*

Oakhill, Cain & Elbro, 2014

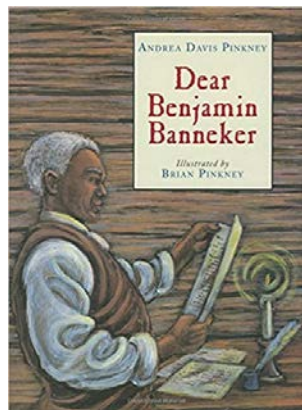
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*...early as kindergarten, language measures, including vocabulary, add to the prediction of reading comprehension difficulties over and above other word reading predictors\_ and are direct measures of word reading performance in second grades.*

Catts et al, 2014

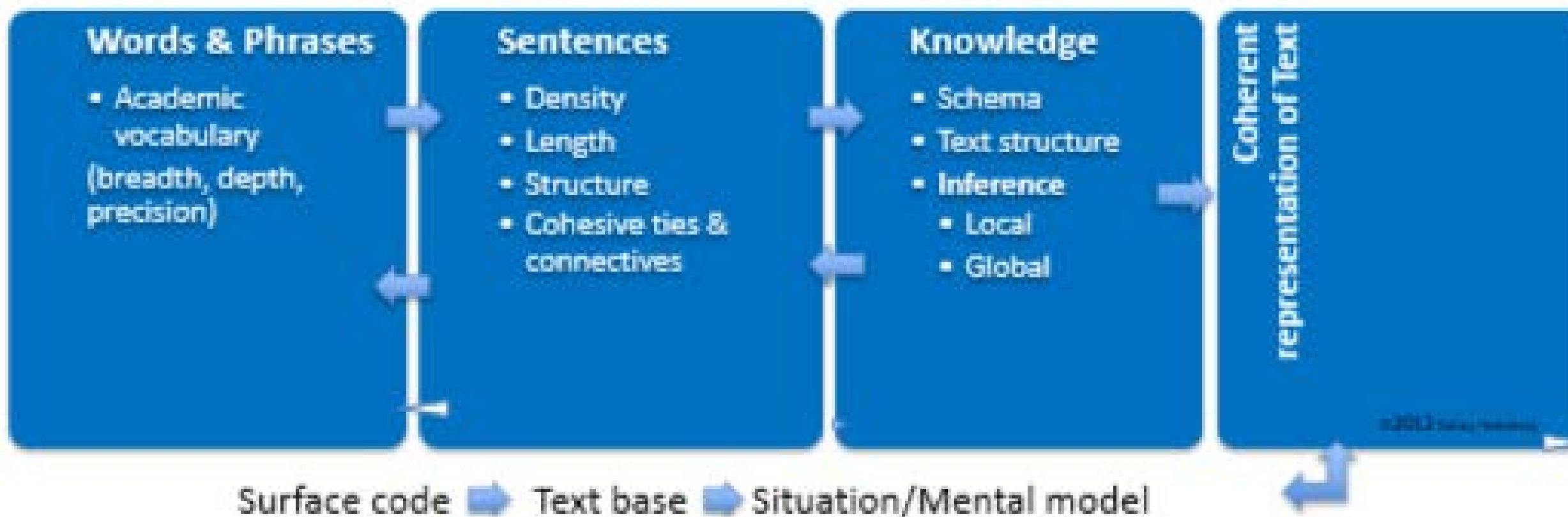
*Children with better vocabulary knowledge have higher reading comprehension scores concurrently and longitudinally.*

Oakhill, Cain & Elbro, 2015



# Levels of language processing...

Based on Oakhill & Cain, 2007

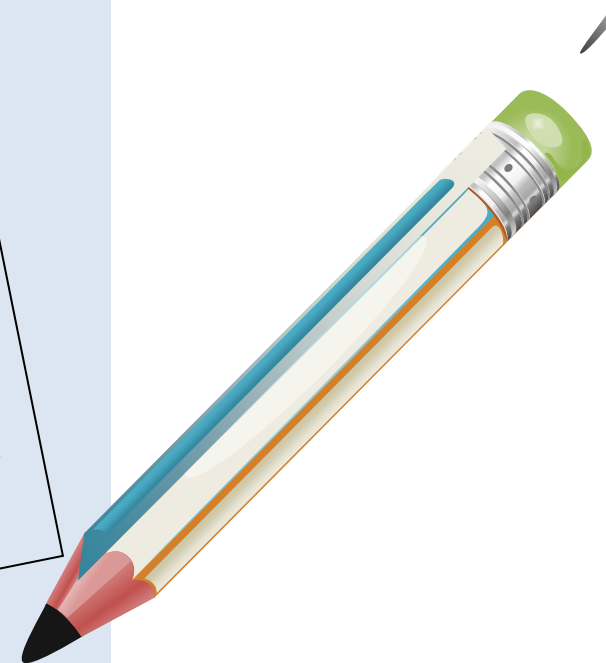




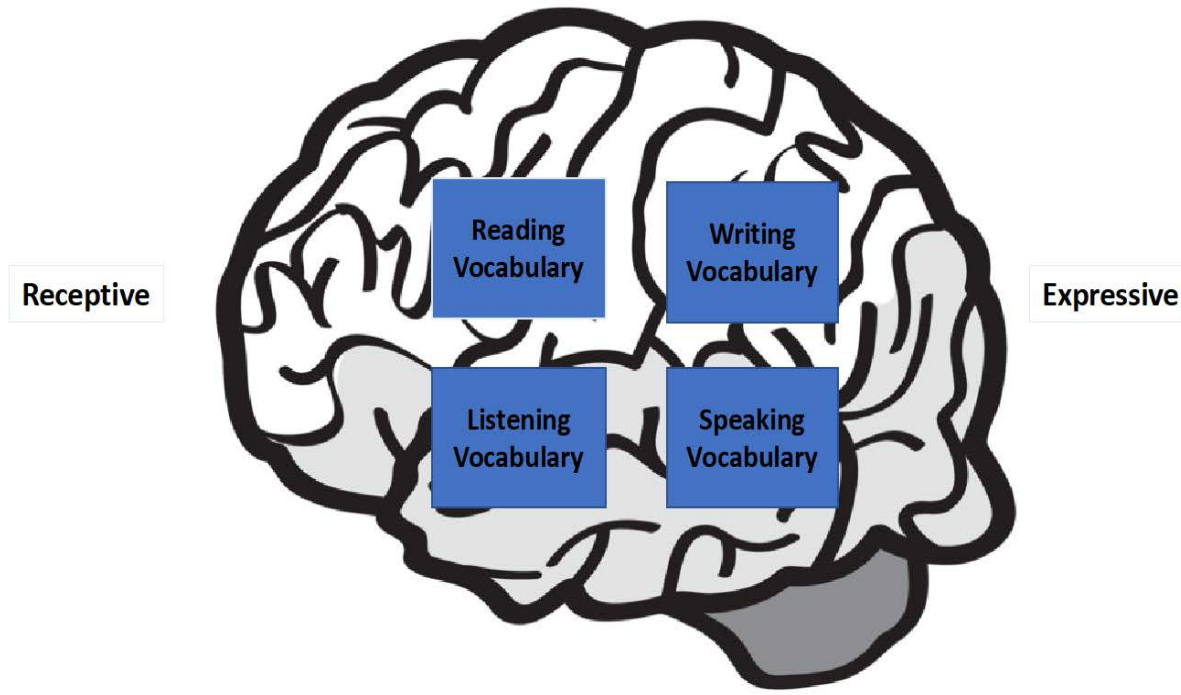
# Today

What evidence supports  
the vocabulary-  
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How can we define and  
describe vocabulary?



# Vocabulary



...an individual's lexicon or mental dictionary of words that serve multiple purposes.

# Vocabulary knowledge is...



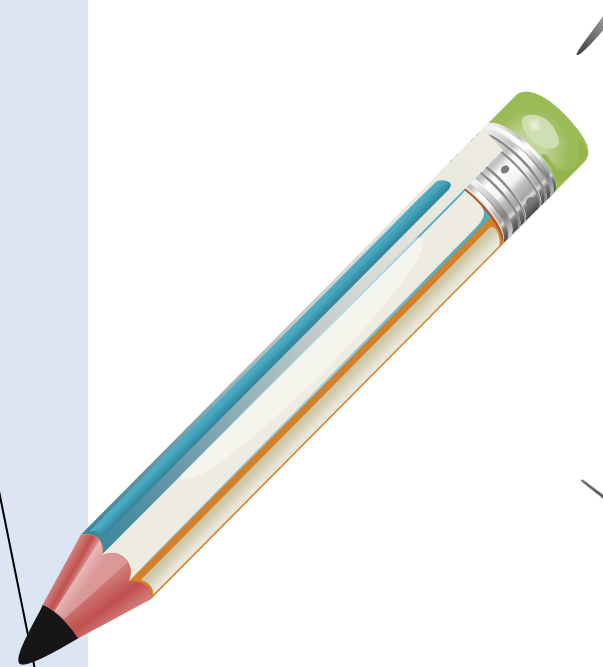
- ✓ Incremental (bit by bit)
- ✓ Interrelated (semantic networks)
- ✓ multidimensional in nature

# Today

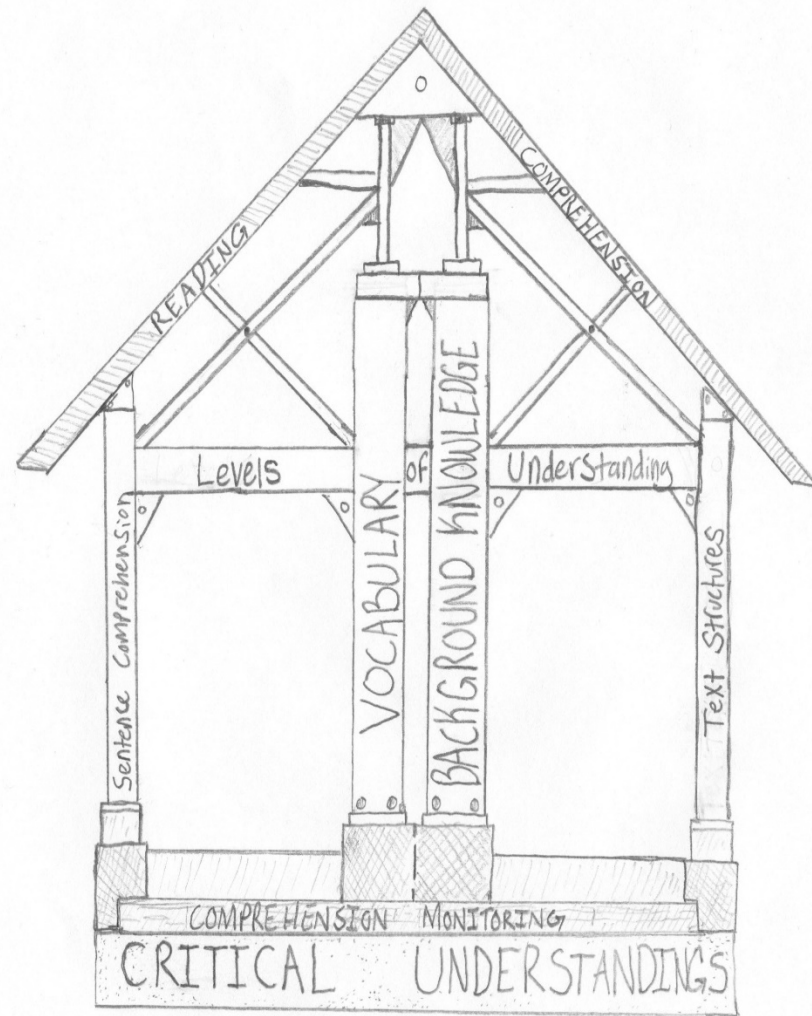
What evidence supports  
the vocabulary-  
comprehension  
connection?

How can we define and  
describe vocabulary?

What are the components



# Constructing the Comprehension House



## A Structured Approach to Reading Comprehension Instruction

**A Blueprint  
Based in the Science  
Literacy & Content Goals  
Purposeful Readings  
Evidence Based Strategies & Activities**

Hennessy, 2020

Will Wagner 01/01/2020

***Which words will your students need to know?  
Which are worth knowing?***

***Which ones will you intentionally target and directly teach?***

***Which ones will you incidentally-on-purpose teach?  
How? When?***

***How and when will you teach and foster the use of independent word learning strategies?***

***Which words will you purposefully discuss and incorporate into expressive language activities?***

Blueprint for Comprehension Instruction	
<b>PREPARING FOR INSTRUCTION</b> CRITICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF TEXT	What do you want students to know and understand after reading the text? What are the critical concepts and understandings—big ideas you want your students to acquire? What texts will support these understandings?
<b>PURPOSE FOR READING TEXT</b>	What are the content instructional goals and objectives? What are the literacy instructional goals and objectives?
<b>TEXT READING VOCABULARY</b>	Which words will your students need to know? Which are worth knowing? Which ones will you intentionally target and directly teach? Which ones will you incidentally-on-purpose teach? How, when? Which words will you purposefully discuss and incorporate into expressive language activities? How and when will you teach and foster the use of independent word learning strategies?
<b>LANGUAGE STRUCTURES (phrases, clauses, sentence comprehension)</b>	Are there phrases, clauses, and sentence structures that may be difficult for your students? How and when will you directly teach sentence comprehension? How and when will you teach students to work with challenging sentences? How will you facilitate the integration of ideas within and between sentences, e.g., the use of cohesive ties and connectives? How and when will you teach students to work with these?
<b>KNOWLEDGE</b> • Text structure • Background knowledge	How is the text organized? How and when will you directly teach students the purpose, features, and signal words of different genres? How will you teach students to use the structure to understand purpose? To organize and express their understanding? What background knowledge is critical to understanding the text? How and when will you teach students to access and build their knowledge and integrate it with the text?
<b>LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING AND INFERENCE</b>	How will you teach students to construct meaning at different levels of understanding, including the surface code, textbase, and mental model of text? How will you directly teach students to use inference to integrate ideas and connect background knowledge to the text? How will you support your students' deep comprehension of text?
<b>EXPRESSION OF UNDERSTANDING</b>	What strategies and activities will you use for students to demonstrate understanding at different levels during and after reading? How will you support their oral and written expression of understanding?

The Reading Comprehension Blueprint by Nancy Lewis Henson, copyright © 2021 by Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved.

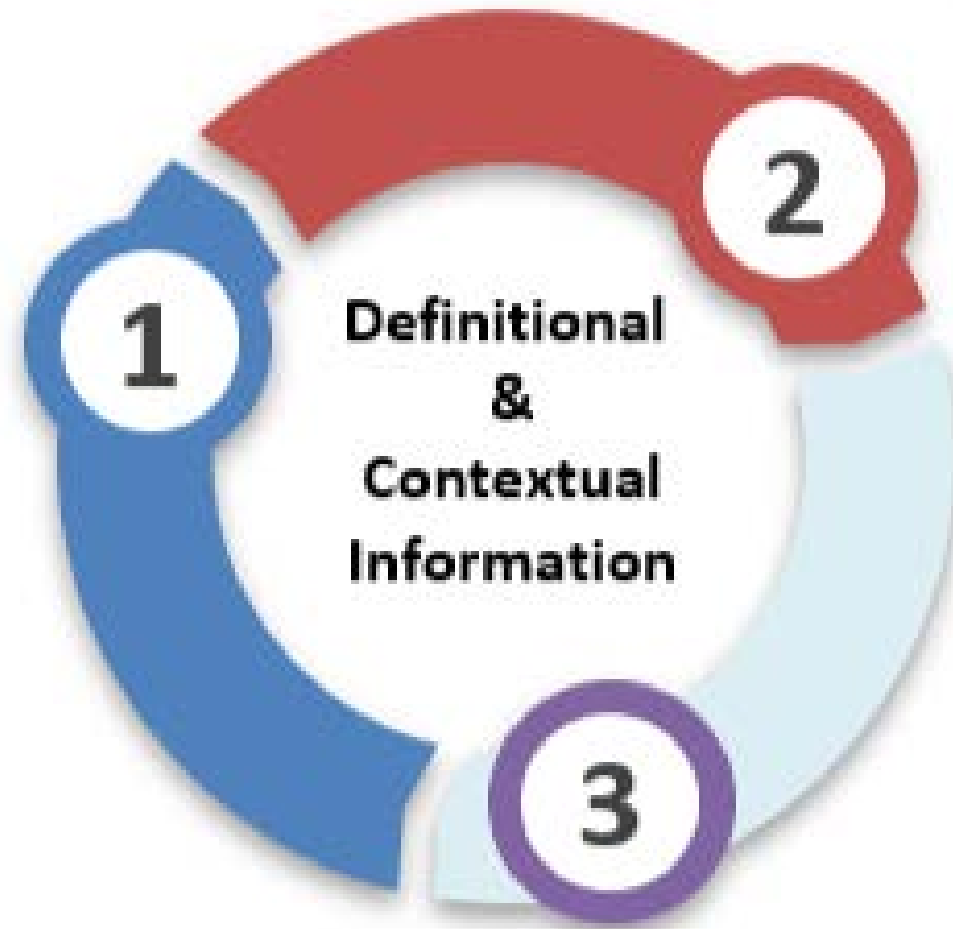
# Informed Vocabulary Framework

Intentional Instruction	Incidental on Purpose Instruction	Intentional Independent Word Learning Strategies Instruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Word Choice</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Principles of Instruction</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Instructional Routines</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Processing &amp; Practice Activities</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Structured Point of Contact Teaching</li> <li>✓ Structured Teacher-Student Talk</li> <li>✓ Structured Shared Reading</li> <li>✓ Structured Independent Reading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Using the Dictionary</li> <li>✓ Using Context Clues</li> <li>✓ Using Morphemic Analysis</li> </ul>
<p><b>Word Consciousness</b></p>	<p><b>Word Consciousness</b></p> <p><i>Purposeful Activities</i></p>	<p><b>Word Consciousness</b></p>

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- ☑ Multiple exposures to targeted words



- ☑ Engagement in deep processing of each word
- ☑ Multiple activities before, during, after reading

## Principles of Instruction

Stahl, 2005



## Teacher Behavior

Pronounces targeted word and discusses structure and/or asks questions about linguistic structure.

Asks students to repeat.

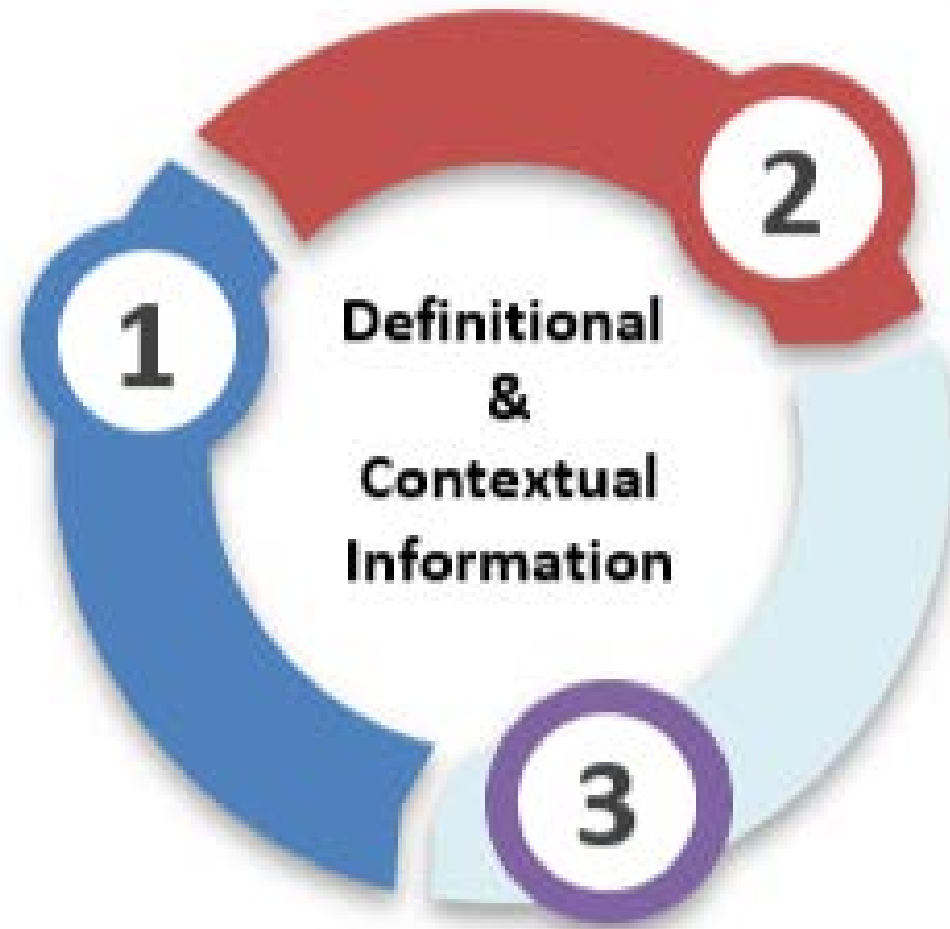
Explains the meaning in everyday language.

Provides examples from context and other situations. Asks students for example.

Says, spells and writes the word.

**Simple Routine-  
Definitional & Contextual  
Information**

- ☑ **Multiple exposures to targeted words**



- ☑ **Engagement in deep processing of each word**
- ☑ **Multiple activities before, during, after reading**

## Principles of Instruction

Stahl, 2005

# Processing & Practice

Connect	Represent	Use
Semantic Maps	Pictures Drawings Videos	Questions, Examples
Semantic Feature Analysis	Gestures and Movement	Conversation Prompts
Concept Maps	Word Walls	Writing Stems

*Multiple exposures & deep processing...*

# Informed Vocabulary Framework

Intentional Instruction	Incidental on Purpose Instruction	Intentional Independent Word Learning Strategies Instruction
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# Deeper Dive

- ✓ Delve into critical aspects of intentional instruction using examples from text.
- ✓ Share examples of incidental on purpose instruction and instructional examples for applying independent word learning strategies.
- ✓ Q & A

# Shifting to Structured Literacy Instruction:

**The Critical Role of  
Background Knowledge**



Nancy Hennessy, M.Ed.

May 10, 2021



*All learning involves transfer from previous experiences. Even initial learning involves transfer that is based on previous experiences and prior knowledge.*

National Research Council, 2000

# Today

- ✓ What evidence supports the connection between background knowledge & comprehension?

How can we define background knowledge?

What are the components of an informed instructional framework for background knowledge?





# Language Comprehension

## LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE  
(facts, concepts, etc.)

VOCABULARY  
(breadth, precision, links, etc.)

LANGUAGE STRUCTURES  
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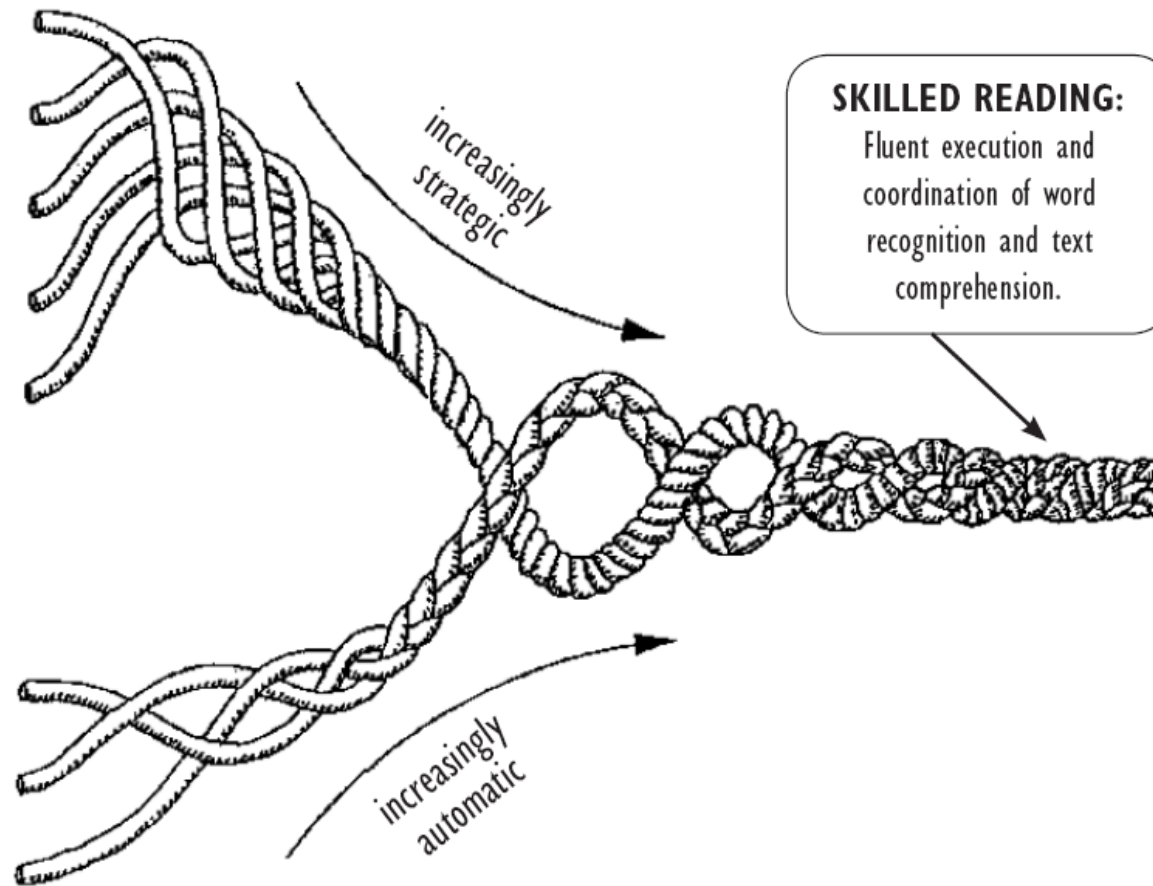
LITERACY KNOWLEDGE  
(print concepts, genres, etc.)

## WORD RECOGNITION

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS  
(syllables, phonemes, etc.)

DECODING (alphabetic principle,  
spelling-sound correspondences)

SIGHT RECOGNITION  
(of familiar words)



### SKILLED READING:

Fluent execution and coordination of word recognition and text comprehension.

*This topical knowledge has also been described as “the key to comprehension.”*

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*Research over the past 40 years or so has made it clear that the knowledge that students bring to a text—any text—will have an impact on what is comprehended or learned from that text. The more you know, the better your comprehension tends to be.*

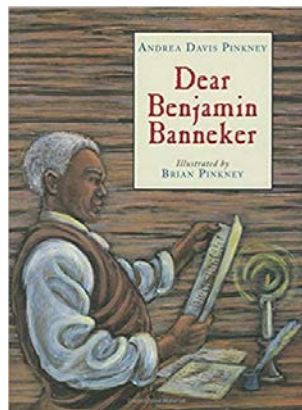
Shanahan, 2017

*Comprehension demands background knowledge because language is full of semantic breaks in which knowledge is assumed and, therefore, comprehension depends on making correct inferences.*

Willingham, 2018

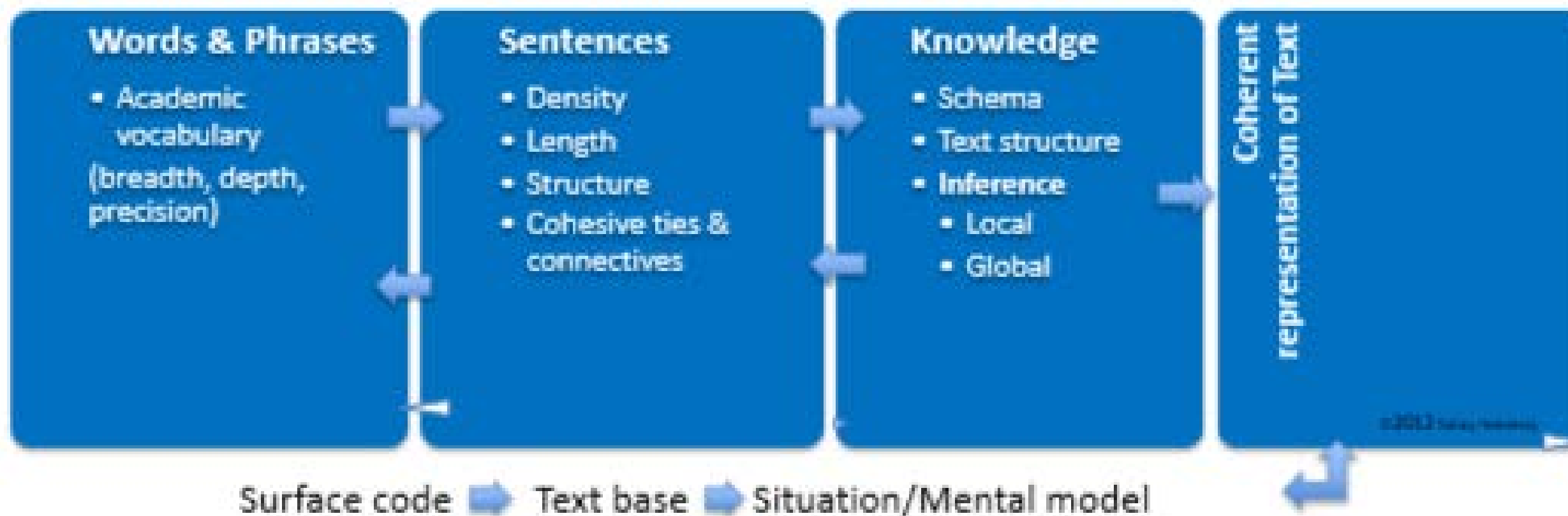
*...that whether or not readers understand a text depends far more on how much **background knowledge and vocabulary** they have relating to the topic than on how much they've practiced comprehension skills.*

Willingham, 2018



# Levels of language processing...

Based on Oakhill & Cain, 2007



*Proficient readers construct an **integrated representation of meaning** rather than an exact record of specific words, syntax, or structure.*

*They create a mental model or situation model by **intertwining** background knowledge and experiences with this text-based representation.*

Snow, 2002

This effortful process of **aggregating successive units of meaning** results in the construction of the mental model.

Hennessy, 2020

# Today

✓ What evidence supports the connection between background knowledge & comprehension?

✓ How can we define background knowledge?

What are the components of an informed instructional framework for background knowledge?



# Background Knowledge

Background knowledge is specific to the situations, problems, and concepts presented in targeted texts used in an academic setting.

*Concepts, experiences, information, and text structures that are relevant to a text under study.*

Brody, 2001



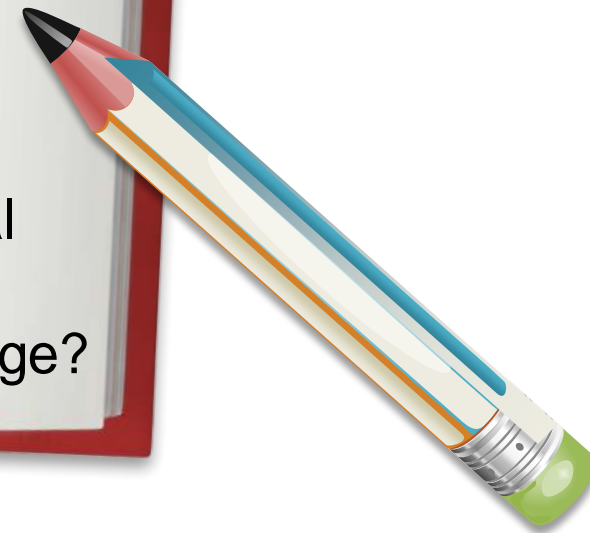
*...knowledge about the topic at hand is like mental velcro. The relevant knowledge gives the words of the text places to stick and make sense, thereby supporting comprehension and propelling the reading process forward.*

*Adams, 2015*

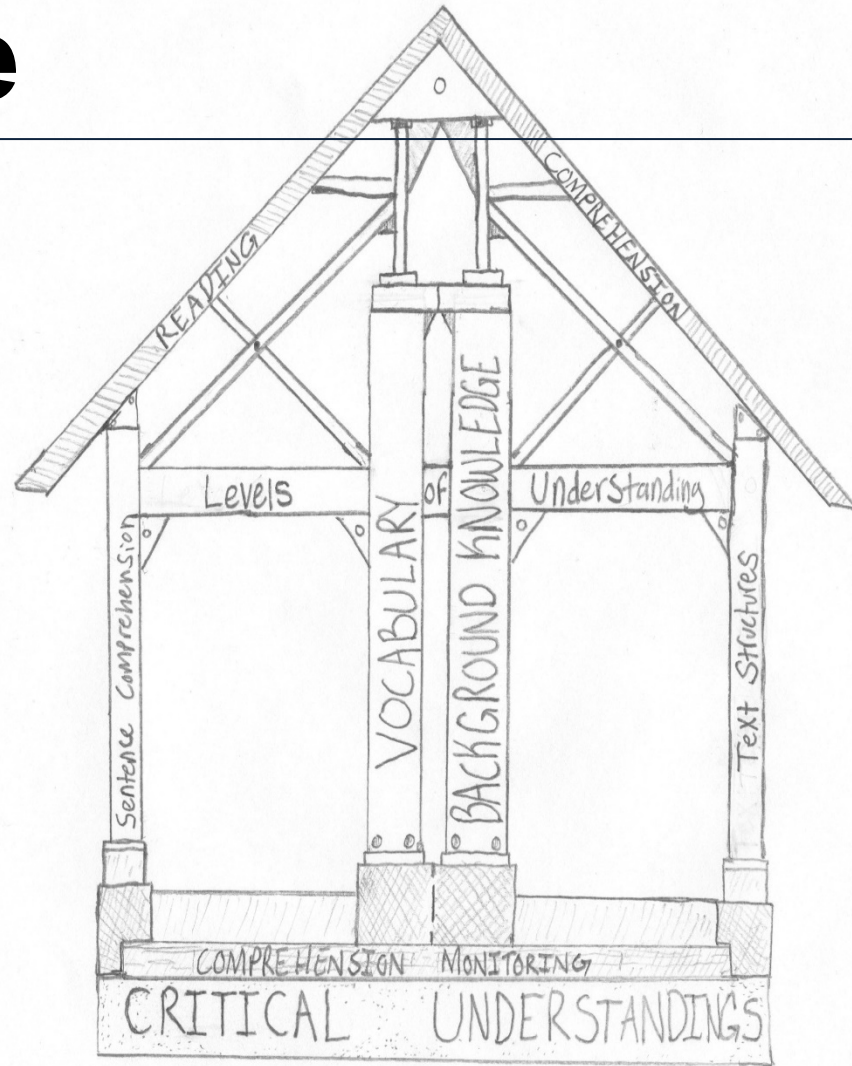


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- ✓ What are the components of an informed instructional framework for background knowledge?



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Hennessy, 2020

Will Wagner 01/01/2020

# General Instructional Recommendations

*What kids read matters.*

*Kids should learn what they read.*

*Kids should review and revisit content.*

Jacobsen, 2019



# What background knowledge/schema is critical to understanding the text?

# How and when will you teach students to access, build and integrate knowledge with the text?

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Comprehension Monitoring  
Before, During, and After Reading, Strategies and Activities

# ABCs Instructional Tools

<b>Activate &amp; Assess Background Knowledge</b>	<b>Build Background Knowledge</b>	<b>Connect to Background Knowledge</b>
<i>Anticipation Guides</i>	<i>Multiple Topical/Themed Texts</i>	<i>Anticipation Guides</i>
<i>Questions &amp; Prompts</i>	<i>Virtual &amp; Real Time Experiences</i>	<i>Questions &amp; Prompts</i>
<i>Charts, Webs, Maps</i>	<i>Authentic Artifacts</i>	<i>Charts, Webs, Maps</i>
<i>Visual Images</i>	<i>Vocabulary Connections</i>	<i>Application to Other Readings</i>

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## Anticipation Guides:

*Teacher prepares a series of written statements that may or may not reflect the critical content of the targeted texts. Before students read, they indicate whether they agree or disagree with statements. After reading, students can compare initial responses and discuss differences.*

## Visual Images:

*Teacher identifies pictures, photographs, illustrations, artwork from picture books, texts or online resources. Coupled with targeted questions, they can support activation of relevant background knowledge from targeted texts before and then, during reading.*

Hennessy, 2020

# Deeper Dive

- ✓ Surface current instructional practices.
- ✓ Delve into critical aspects of intentional instruction using examples from text.
- ✓ Q & A