

# SPELDNSW

## Learning Difficulties Q & A #3

### What Factors Contribute to Strong Reading Comprehension?

The ultimate goal of reading is to understand everything that we read. Reading comprehension involves making meaning from written text using our knowledge of words, concepts, and ideas. There are a number of factors that contribute to a child's ability to comprehend text including:

- The ability to read words accurately and fluently using letter-sound knowledge (phonics);
- Understanding the meaning of the words read (vocabulary);
- Thinking about each complete sentence and understanding how it is structured (grammar);
- Retaining information as subsequent sentences are read (working memory); and,
- Using world-knowledge to understand the purpose and context of what is being read (information stored in long-term memory).

When students are beginning to read, there are two common reasons why they have difficulty understanding what they have read. The first is due to difficulties accurately reading individual words, and the other is a lack of understanding of what the words actually mean. If a child is having difficulty with reading comprehension, it is important to consider difficulties with decoding or vocabulary as a possible cause. Activities aimed at improving vocabulary and reading accuracy are likely to have a direct impact on a child's reading comprehension.

Activities that focus on <https://dsf.net.au/phonological-awareness/> will help to develop a child's reading accuracy. These might include:

- Syllable blending and segmenting – orally separating words into syllables and blending syllables together eg. ba/na/na, farm/yard;
- Alliteration - keeping the first sound the same e.g. silly snakes slithered sideways slowly; and,
- Phoneme awareness – orally blending sounds together to form words eg. /c/ /a/ /t/ = cat - and orally segmenting words into individual sounds eg. dog = /d/ /o/ /g/.

It is also important to ensure that the child has strong **phonic knowledge**, which is an understanding that letters represent sounds (in order to read) and that sounds are represented by letters (in order to spell). This knowledge is gained through structured, systematic, and explicit teaching of the English 'code' or letter-sound correspondences. (eg. the /a/ sound is written using the letter 'a' and the /sh/ sound is written using the letters 's' and 'h')

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**Vocabulary knowledge** includes: an understanding of what a word refers to (its function), how words go together (groups or categories), words that mean the same thing (synonyms) and words that mean different things (antonyms). To improve a child's vocabulary, ensure they have plenty of opportunities to hear and experiment with new words by: telling them stories, answering their questions with detailed explanations and extending the conversation by asking further questions, reading to them, and listening to audio books. When you come across a word the child doesn't know, discuss answers to questions such as "What does it do?", "Where does it live?" or "Where could I find it?", "What group does it belong to?" and "What is another name for it?".

Research has shown that among students with appropriate decoding and vocabulary skills, less than 1% display reading comprehension problems (specifically in Years 1, 2, and 3). A range of strategies that have been shown to assist all students with reading comprehension (including those students experiencing difficulties), will be discussed in the next email alert.

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