



# An Introduction to Structured Literacy

*Ros Lugg*

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# What's in a name?

## Structured Literacy

or

## Science of Reading?

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# What is the Science of Reading?

The science of reading is a vast interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing.

This research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages.

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## So what is Structured Literacy?

**Structured Literacy** = a trademarked term owned by the International Dyslexia Association.

**"An approach grounded in the Science of Reading."**

A specific methodology – not the research itself.



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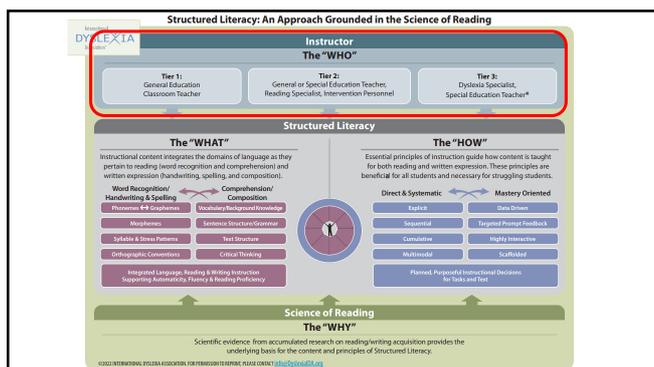
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## What's in a name?

**Structured Literacy** – A specific methodology

**Science of Reading** – Underpinning research



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### Core Principles of Structured Literacy

**Explicit** – the teacher explains and models key skills, with well-chosen examples.

Children are not expected to develop these skills based mainly on exposure and incidental learning opportunities.

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### Core Principles of Structured Literacy

**Systematic and cumulative** – a planned sequence of instruction. Important prerequisite skills taught before more advanced skills.

**For instance:**  
Children are not expected to decode or spell complex words before simpler words.

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### Core Principles of Structured Literacy

**Diagnostic** – students are screened and their progress is monitored. Students who need help are promptly identified.

**Effective interventions** provide opportunities for students to respond and practise what they are learning, with the teacher providing clear, prompt, constructive feedback to students' errors.

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## Core Principles of Structured Literacy

Assessments are used to help target specific skills that need to be addressed for individual students.

Interventions should be appropriately intensive, with a greater level of intensity (i.e. smaller group size, more time) for children who are further behind.

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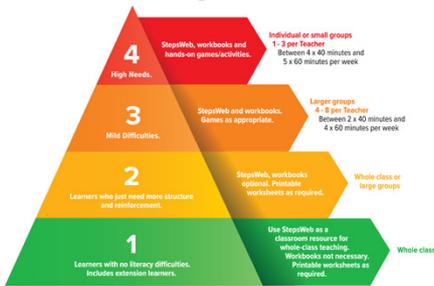
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### The 4 Tier Model




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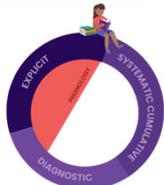
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## Core Principles of Structured Literacy



**Phonology**  
Patterns of sounds in a language

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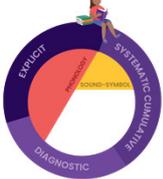
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### Core Principles of Structured Literacy



**Sound-Symbol**  
Phonic knowledge and skills.  
Knowing how sounds are represented by letters and letter patterns.

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### Core Principles of Structured Literacy



**Syllables**  
A word unit/part with one vowel sound.

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### Core Principles of Structured Literacy



**Morphology**  
An understanding of words and their relationships.  
*dog - dogs*  
*walk - walking, walked*  
*non/sense*

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## Core Principles of Structured Literacy



**Syntax**  
The arrangement or order of words in a sentence to convey meaning.

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## Core Principles of Structured Literacy



**Semantics**  
The meaning of language.

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## How should this work out in practice?

Teachers avoid introducing confusable phonic elements (b/p or multiple short vowel sounds) simultaneously.

Children also have ample opportunities to apply their developing skills in reading texts they are capable of decoding and comprehending.

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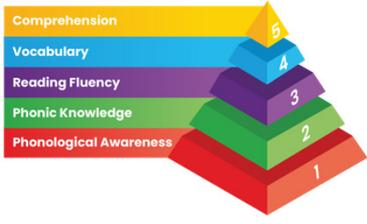
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A key model developed by the USA National Reading Panel in 2000

Describes the progression of skills as reading develops.

- Sequential
- Cumulative

**The 5 Big Ideas in Beginning Reading**



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**Cognitive Load Theory**  
Sweilfer, J., 1988

Learners can absorb and retain information effectively only if it is provided in such a way that it does not 'overload' their mental capacity.

**Key principle:** You can't do two 'cognitive tasks' at the same time.

Cognitive = something you need to think about.

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**Cognitive Load Theory**  
Sweilfer, J., 1988

Cognitive tasks overload working memory.

**Working Memory** = the ability to retain and simultaneously process information

**Key message:** Make as many aspects of literacy automatic for our learners.

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## Key Misunderstandings about Structured Literacy



1. We must only use decodable texts.



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### Decodable Texts

We shouldn't be encouraging students to guess words from the context or from pictures.

Students should only be presented with texts with words they can decode.



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### The Reading Ladder



Progress in reading



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The Reading Ladder



Using mainly decoding strategy  
Can't follow the sense of what he's reading

8 year reading level

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The Reading Ladder



8 year reading level

12 years old

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The Reading Ladder



Not interesting to him anyway!

8 year reading level

12 years old

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The Reading Ladder

8 year reading level

12 years old

13-15 year intellectual level

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The Reading Ladder

Overwhelmingly negative process!

8 year reading level

13-15 year intellectual level

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The Reading Ladder

Intellectual aspects:

- comprehension
- reading for information
- enjoyment!

Mechanical aspects:

- decoding skill
- word recognition
- understanding text

8 year reading level

13-15 year intellectual level

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## So how do we develop decoding?

Some decodable texts – certainly!

Decoding skills and knowledge can effectively be taught through literacy games and activities.



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## Phonic video + Find the Letter

A short phonic video introduces and explains a letter sound or phonic pattern. Then the student listens to sounds and chooses the right letter/pattern.



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## Word Ladder

Students are given a word and asked to change it into another word by swapping sounds.



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**Feed the kiwi**

Students hear the word and assemble it using sound tiles. If they are correct, the kiwi gets his worm.

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**Using appropriate strategies**

When reading a decodable text – absolutely stop and tackle each word.

Other passages – read for content or enjoyment – don't make your learner stop and work out each word. Just give it to him!

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**Key Misunderstandings about Structured Literacy**

1. We must only use decodable texts.
2. Everything needs to be at the individual phoneme level. No word families or onset + rime.

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## Phonic Approaches

Grapheme-Phoneme Level

b - a - t

Onset + Rime Level

b - at

Word Families Approach






bat    cat    hat    rat

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## Statement on Phonic Approaches

**National Reading Panel, 2000:**  
Found no difference in effectiveness between these approaches.

**Some later research:**  
Initial focus on grapheme-phoneme level can lead to better reading outcomes.

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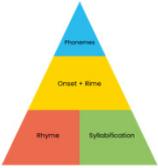
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## Phonological Awareness or Phonemic Awareness




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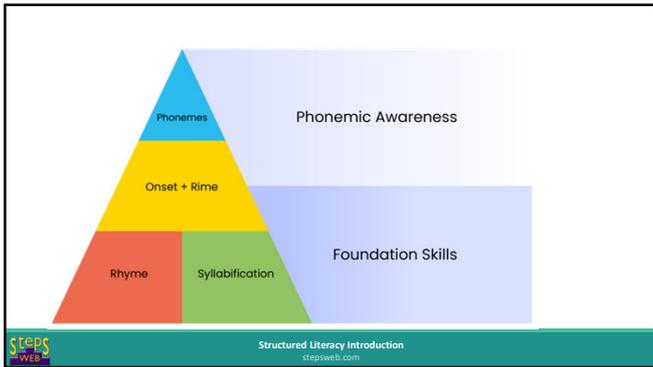
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## Rhyme



**Rhyme Recognition** – important for early literacy.

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## Rhyme Research



**Rhyme Recognition** for 4-5 year-old pre-readers is the single most important predictor of later reading accuracy.

Bryant & Bradley (1983)

**Later research:**  
Ability to identify individual phonemes is the most important predictor.

for 6 year-olds

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### Development of Segmentation

sentences → words

words → syllables

words or syllables → phonemes

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### Development of Segmentation

sentences → words

words → syllables

**words → onset + rime**

words or syllables → phonemes

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### Onset + Rime

cat hat rat

Breaking words into two 'chunks' is significantly easier than breaking it into individual phonemes (sounds).

# string

Anything between 2 and 6!

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**Individual phonemes:** s - t - r - i - ng 

(sounds)

**Onset + rime:** str - ing 

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**Individual phonemes** 

Not a natural stage in the development of phonological awareness.

Dyslexic learners in particular will struggle with this activity.



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**Rhyme** 

**Rhyme Recognition** – important for early literacy.

Particularly significant for developing **analogical transfer**.

**Analogical transfer** – the ability to:

- Recognise patterns in words.
- Apply that to work out unknown words.

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w or l

ball  
tall  
mall  
tall  
**wall**

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**Statement on Phonic Approaches**

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better **reading** outcomes.

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**Importance of onset + rime**  
(Word Families)

Make 500 common words from only 37 rimes.

Phase 1 Rimes				
-at	-ell	-in	-ot	-ug
-an		-ill	-op	-uck
-ap		-ip	-ock	
-ash		-it		
-ack		-ick		
		-ing		

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## Importance of onset + rime

(Word Families)

Phase 2 Rimes				
-ank	-est	-ink	-oke	-unk
-ate		-ice		-ump
-ale		-ide		
-ake		-ine		
-ame				

Phase 3 Rimes			
-ail	-eat	-ight	-ore
-ain			
-aw			
-ay			

Note: This sequence is consistent with the Scope and Sequence for Ready to Read Phonics Plus.



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## Rhyme

Students hear the target picture word and then select pictures which rhyme with that word. They can click on pictures to hear them.



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## Sound Chunks

Students hear the onset and rime of a word (beginning and end chunks). They mentally blend these and click on the correct picture.



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**Chunks**

Students click on the onset (beginning) of the word and then select the correct rime (end chunk).

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**Sound Splits**

Students break words into individual sounds.

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**Key Misunderstandings about Structured Literacy**

1. We must only use decodable texts.
2. Everything needs to be at the individual phoneme level.  
No word families or onset + rime.
3. We need to teach syllable rules.

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## Syllabification

**Auditory Syllabification** – the ability to break spoken words into 'chunks'.

**remember**

**Syllabification Rules** – how to break written words into syllables



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## Auditory Syllabification



The ability to hear the beats (syllables) in a word.

Easy way to teach it:

Hold your hand under your chin and say the word.

The number of times your chin touches your hand is the number of syllables.



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## Syllabification Rules

### Six Types of Syllable

- Closed syllables
- Open syllables
- Silent 'e'
- Vowel pair/teams
- R-controlled
- le ending



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## Cognitive Load theory

**Rule-based teaching** can lead to cognitive overload – particularly for our dyslexic and other struggling learners.



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## How reliable are syllable rules?

**“Does English have Useful Syllable Division Patterns?”**  
(Reading Research Quarterly, 2020)

Devin Kearns, PhD



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## How reliable are syllable rules?

Syllable Pattern	Examples	Reliability
VC-CV	e.g. pic-nic, tab-let	41-79%
CV-CV	e.g. tu-lip, cam-el	33-47%
V-CV	With long 'u'	84%
V-CV	With long 'i'	18%



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### How reliable are syllable rules?

Kearns, D., 2020

"For longer VCV words, the vowel has the short sound more often than the long sound, in contradiction to the presumed pattern."

"The data suggest that there is really no V/CV division pattern at all."



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### How effective is teaching syllable rules?

Bhattacharya & Ehri, 2004

Those approaches that taught rigid spelling rules for syllabification didn't improve reading.

Those approaches that aimed at flexibility in the use of syllables to decode words did significantly better.



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### Cognitive Load theory

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## Syllables

Students join syllables together to form words.

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## Key Misunderstandings about Structured Literacy

1. We must only use decodable texts.
2. Everything needs to be at the individual phoneme level.  
No word families or onset + rime.
3. We need to teach syllable rules.
4. We shouldn't teach sight vocabulary any more.

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## What are sight words, exactly?

High frequency words which are irregular or not yet decodable.

Those words which have been orthographically mapped so they no longer need to be decoded.

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## Misunderstanding about sight words



~~Sight word is one which has been learned purely from its visual pattern.~~

A sight word is a word which has initially been decoded  
- or its phonic structure has been explained.

*said*     *s ai d*

Then it's repeatedly seen until it becomes a sight word –  
which can be recognised automatically without decoding.



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## Why are sight words important?



By definition, they're common words which will be met frequently  
in the early stages.

The more words which can be instantly visually  
recognised, the quicker the reader will make that  
transition to being a fluent reader.



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## Key phases of literacy development

*Ehri, L. 1985*

**Logographic  
Phase**

Visual recognition  
– tiny number of  
words.

**Alphabetic  
Phase**

Ability to decode  
regular words.

**Orthographic  
Phase**

Visual recognition of  
words without  
conscious decoding.



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## Understanding Structured Literacy

Notes available on website. Send in any Q&As.

Planning next webinar on **Orthographic Mapping**.

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If you'd like a free trial of StepsWeb, let us know.



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