




An Introduction to Structured Literacy

Ros Lugg

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com




What's in a name?

Structured Literacy

or

Science of Reading?

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com



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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com



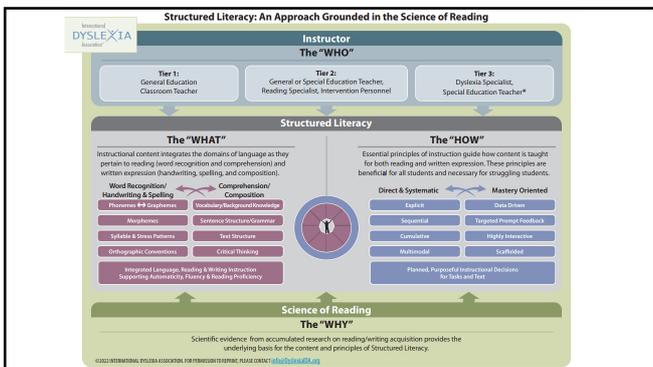
So what is Structured Literacy?

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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com




What's in a name?

Structured Literacy – A specific methodology

Science of Reading – Underpinning research

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

International
DYSLEXIA
Association

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.

STEPS WEB Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

International
DYSLEXIA
Association

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.

STEPS WEB Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

International
DYSLEXIA
Association

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.

STEPS WEB Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

International
DYSLEXIA
Association

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.

STEPS WEB Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

The 4 Tier Model



4 High Needs: StepsWeb, workbooks and hands-on games/activities. Individual or small groups 1-3 per Teacher. Between 4-40 minutes and 5-60 minutes per week.

3 Mild Difficulties: StepsWeb and workbooks. Games as appropriate. Larger groups 4-8 per Teacher. Between 2-40 minutes and 2-60 minutes per week.

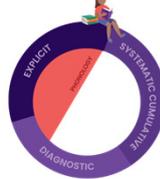
2 Learners who just need more structure and reinforcement: StepsWeb, workbooks optional. Printable worksheets as required. Whole class or large groups.

1 Learners with no literacy difficulties. Includes extension learners: Use StepsWeb as a classroom resource for whole class teaching. Workbooks not necessary. Printable worksheets as required. Whole class.

STEPS WEB Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

International
DYSLEXIA
Association

Core Principles of Structured Literacy

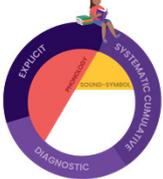


Phonology
Patterns of sounds in a language

STEPS WEB Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

International
DYSLEXIA
Association

Core Principles of Structured Literacy



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

STEPS
WEB

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsworld.com

International
DYSLEXIA
Association

Core Principles of Structured Literacy



Syllables
A word unit/part with one vowel sound.

STEPS
WEB

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsworld.com

International
DYSLEXIA
Association

Core Principles of Structured Literacy



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

STEPS
WEB

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsworld.com

International
DYSLEXIA
Association

Core Principles of Structured Literacy



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

STEPS
WEB

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsworld.com

International
DYSLEXIA
Association

Core Principles of Structured Literacy



Semantics
The meaning of language.

STEPS
WEB

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsworld.com



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.

STEPS
WEB

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsworld.com

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



Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

Cognitive Load Theory
Sweilner, 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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

Cognitive Load Theory
Sweilner, 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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

Key Misunderstandings about Structured Literacy



- We must only use decodable texts.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

The Reading Ladder



Progress in reading



Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

The Reading Ladder



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

8 year reading level

Structured Literacy Introduction

The Reading Ladder



8 year reading level

12 years old

Structured Literacy Introduction

The Reading Ladder



Not interesting to him anyway!

8 year reading level

12 years old

Structured Literacy Introduction

The Reading Ladder



8 year reading level

12 years old

13-15 year intellectual level

Structured Literacy Introduction

The Reading Ladder



Overwhelmingly negative process!

8 year reading level

13-15 year intellectual level

Structured Literacy Introduction

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

Structured Literacy Introduction



So how do we develop decoding?

Some decodable texts – certainly!

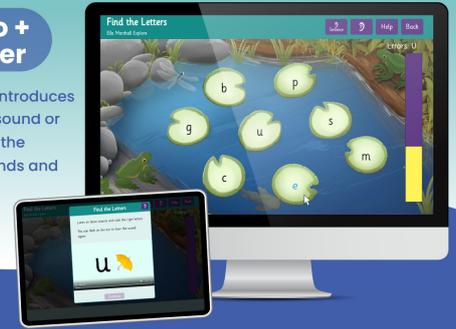
Decoding skills and knowledge can effectively be taught through literacy games and activities.



Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

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.



Word Ladder

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



Feed the kiwi

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



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!



Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

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.



Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

International DYSLEXIA Association **Phonic Approaches**

Grapheme-Phoneme Level: b - a - t

Onset + Rime Level: b - at

Word Families Approach

bat cat hat rat

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

International DYSLEXIA Association **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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

Phonological Awareness
or
Phonemic Awareness

Phonemes

Onset + Rime

Rhyme

Syllabification

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

Phonemes

Phonemic Awareness

Onset + Rime

Rhyme

Syllabification

Foundation Skills

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

Rhyme

Rhyme Recognition – important for early literacy.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

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

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

Development of Segmentation



sentences → words
 words → syllables
 words or syllables → phonemes

Structured Literacy Introduction
 stepsweb.com

Development of Segmentation



sentences → words
 words → syllables
 words → onset + rime
 words or syllables → phonemes

Structured Literacy Introduction
 stepsweb.com

Onset + Rime



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

string

Anything between 2 and 6!



Structured Literacy Introduction
 stepsweb.com

Individual phonemes: (sounds)

s - t - r - i - n - g 

Onset + rime:

str - ing 

Structured Literacy Introduction
 stepsweb.com

Individual phonemes

Not a natural stage in the development of phonological awareness.

Dyslexic learners in particular will struggle with this activity.




Structured Literacy Introduction
 stepsweb.com

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.



Structured Literacy Introduction
 stepsweb.com

w or l

ball
tall
mall
tall
wall

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

International
DYSLEXIA
Association

Statement on Phonic Approaches

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

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

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

Importance of onset + rime (Word Families)

Make 500 common words from only 37 rimes.

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

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

Rhyme

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

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

Chunks

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

Sound Splits

Students break words into individual sounds.

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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

Syllabification

Auditory Syllabification – the ability to break spoken words into ‘chunks’.

rember

Syllabification Rules – how to break written words into syllables

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

Syllabification Rules

Six Types of Syllable

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

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com



Cognitive Load theory

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

How reliable are syllable rules?

“Does English have Useful Syllable Division Patterns?”

(Reading Research Quarterly, 2020)

Devin Kearns, PhD

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%

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.”

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.



Cognitive Load theory

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

Syllables

Students join syllables together to form words.

The screenshot shows a game titled 'Syllables' with a 'Help' and 'Back' button. On the left, a list of syllables includes: physis, photo, elephant, raphae, pharmacy, telephone, te, to, phew, le, ne, phone, phy, phar ma cy (highlighted in a red box), pho, ant, sics.

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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com

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.

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com



Understanding Structured Literacy

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

Planning next webinar on **Orthographic Mapping**.

Sign up to our newsletter. Home page: www.stepsweb.com

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

STEPS
WEB

Structured Literacy Introduction
stepsweb.com