Does EdReports Review for the Science of Reading?

FAQs Regarding EdReports' English Language Arts Reviews

EdReports' review process for K–5 English language arts (ELA) instructional materials is built on a foundation of college- and career-readiness standards and well-established research about how students learn how to read. Our reports reflect not only alignment to the standards but also whether or not materials include the innovations necessary to prepare kids to learn the content in the standards.

This document answers frequently asked questions about EdReports' ELA review process and how it addresses key research components often discussed when referring to the science of reading.

Is there a science to teaching reading?

The National Reading Panel[1] identified five essential components every child must master to be a competent reader: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. A quality reading program, well implemented, teaches each of the five components[2] systematically, explicitly, and with planned connections to the others. The science behind teaching students to read and comprehend is grounded in research, such as The Simple View of Reading[3] and Scarborough's Reading Rope[4], which support critical components of a comprehensive reading program.

Q: Does EdReports review for reading science?

A: Yes. EdReports reviews the degree to which each set of instructional materials aligns to college- and career-ready standards (CCR) which encompass reading science. In addition, our review criteria align to the Instructional Shifts[5] which describe how the standards raise expectations across multiple areas of students' educational experience.

EdReports reviews ELA materials in three different formats using a corresponding set of review tools for each format. EdReports' tools include indicators to address curriculum components that are grounded in reading science such as systematic and explicit instruction in foundational skills (including print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition and analysis, and fluency) and content-rich reading to build vocabulary. Furthermore, reviewers analyze the amount of instruction and practice time alloted for foundational skills to ensure that students have adequate opportunities to master them.

In addition, EdReports reviews include indicators that review for instruction of and practice of reading, writing, speaking, and listening based on complex and engaging texts that build foundational knowledge. All review tools

can be accessed for free on our website. Please refer to our Quick Guide on where to locate the science of reading in our review tools.

Q: Where in your reports can I find evidence that EdReports is reviewing for the science of reading?

A: You can find this information in the Science of Reading Snapshots in our K–5 ELA reviews, as well as our overview of the Snapshots, and our Science of Reading Snapshots Scoring Guide.

Please also refer to our Quick Guide on where to locate the science of reading in our K–5 review tools.

Q: Are College and Career-Ready Standards robust enough to address all aspects of the science of reading?

A: Standards are a floor, not a ceiling. Consider building codes, for example. They are a set of recognized standards that aim for the minimum standards required for safety, but everyone would prefer to live in a building that went beyond the standards set.

At EdReports, our tools review for components of reading science and also review for explicit and systematic instruction in foundational skills with opportunities for students to apply newly learned skills.

EdReports is just one resource we recommend educators consult when considering instructional materials. We always encourage school systems to use multiple gauges of a curriculum's quality including developing an instructional vision that prioritizes the needs of local communities.

Q: How does EdReports address concerns that the standards demand an instructional pace that is developmentally too fast for a majority of students?

A: We recognize there are some tensions in the standards in terms of pacing for early learners. Our process, in both the comprehensive and the foundational skills tools, reviews for systematic and explicit instruction in all foundational skills, including phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics. Additionally, we review for multiple opportunities for students to practice and apply learning that aligns with the research-based scope and sequence of the materials. Our tools review for opportunities for assessment and differentiated instruction to ensure all students are progressing toward growth and proficiency in foundational skills.

Q: Do EdReports reviewers have the expertise to evaluate instructional materials for the science of reading?

A: Yes. Our educator reviewers go through an extensive screening process where they are interviewed, provide work samples, and are scored on a rubric based on early literacy content knowledge. Reviewers receive hours of virtual and in-person training before working in teams to conduct reviews. Training includes not only deepening early literacy content knowledge, but also how to identify quality components within instructional materials.

Collectively, our reviewers have thousands of hours of experience in education. Educator reviewer bios can be found on our website.

Q: How do EdReports reviewers conduct reviews of ELA K–5 instructional materials?

A: In a review, we use a cadre of K–5 ELA educators, district and state leaders, early literacy consultants, and higher-ed professors and instructors who bring deep expertise in foundational skills and early literacy. Reviewers apply their knowledge to look closely at all the essential components that support students as they acquire the skills necessary to be literate. Additionally, all reports are reviewed prior to publication by EdReports ELA staff to check for accuracy and alignment.

Over the course of a review, reviewers spend an average of 5-10 hours per week over several months examining materials, gathering evidence, and reaching a consensus on scoring recommendations.

Q: Aren't educators with a general reading background not well informed enough to conduct these reviews?

A: Our educator reviewers bring deep expertise in foundational skills and early literacy. Collectively, they have thousands of hours of classroom experience as well as learning and certifications in higher education and academia. In addition to the professional expertise of our reviewers, our review tools act as a roadmap to ensure every review is consistent and comprehensive. For example, in indicator 1o of our K–2 comprehensive tool and indicators 1c–1e of our foundational skills tool, reviewers use guidance from our Evidence Guides to review instructional materials for multiple opportunities for students to receive explicit and systematic instruction in both phonological awareness and phonemic awareness that is aligned to the scope and sequence.

Phonics—including opportunities for students to build, manipulate, spell, and encode each newly learned sound and sound patterns—is reviewed in indicators 1o and 1r of the K–2 comprehensive tool and 1f–1j of the foundational skills tool.

Additionally, the reviewers use the foundational skills tool to review for multiple student practice opportunities that align with the explicit and systematic instruction included in the instructional materials. Reviewers also use the foundational skills tool to review for differentiated instruction in 1t and assessment in 1s of the K–2 comprehensive tool. In the foundational skills tool, that information is located in gateway 2, particularly indicator 2gii for assessment of phonological awareness, 2giii for assessment of phonics, and 2i for differentiation.

Q: Is "knowledge building" represented in College and Career-Ready Standards and EdReports reviews?

A: Yes. A knowledge rich curriculum[6] ensures that students are learning content knowledge and vocabulary so they can make meaning of what they are reading and rapidly build vocabulary. These skills are addressed in gateway 2 of all EdReports ELA review tools for grades K–12 (Gateway 2: Indicators 2A – 2F).

Q: What would you recommend district leaders and/or review committees, including site and teacher leaders, consider when evaluating programs that support what is known about reading science?

A: We recommend the following actions:

- Consider your vision of instruction for literacy, or establish one, then assess what level of support students and teachers need specifically to be successful in implementing a K–2 comprehensive literacy program.
- Review the scope and sequence as well as the research-base of the program under evaluation. This step is necessary to help determine professional learning that may need to occur if materials are selected for implementation (e.g. synthetic vs. analytic phonics).
- Evaluate instructional materials. Include a review for systematic and explicit instruction of foundational skills and how students apply new learning (e.g., multimodal opportunities, worksheets, decodable texts). A deep dive of the texts provided over the course of the year should be reviewed for engaging, complex texts with a consideration of local priorities.
- Ensure materials provide students with regular opportunities to read, listen, write, and speak using evidence from the text.
- Align your assessments. They need to integrate with the scope and sequence of your materials and provide meaningful information for stakeholders. During evaluation, committees should analyze opportunities for authentic and appropriate differentiation of learning to ensure all students progress toward becoming skilled, literate individuals.

Learn more:

- How to Select a High-Quality K–5 ELA Curriculum
- Foundational Skills Materials: Should I Supplement?
- The Path to Reading Requires Quality Curriculum

Q: Does EdReports' review process privilege any specific approach to reading instruction?

A: No. We do not review for approach. The EdReports review process evaluates instructional materials for foundational skills called for by college and career-ready standards including whether or not the skills are presented systematically with explicit instruction and grounded in a research-based progression. Our review tools, which are based on foundational skills research and college and career-ready standards, can be downloaded for free from our website.

Q: Isn't a green, yellow, or red rating from EdReports a de facto recommendation based on your assessment of whether or not an instructional material is high quality?

A: EdReports does not make recommendations or determine whether one curriculum is "better" than another. This is because what is "better" for one student, teacher, or district requires a lot more information than what we look for in our review indicators.

EdReports' reviews focus on whether materials meet our indicators, criteria, and gateways for both alignment and usability. Different indicators and criteria may have more significance to different districts based on the professional support, student learning results, and overall local context regardless of a program's summative total. Our aim is to empower schools and districts with information to choose the best curricula to meet their local needs.

All EdReports review tools are available for free at: edreports.org/process/review-tools

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[1] Report of the National Reading Panel: https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/nrp/findings

[2] Moats, Louisa, "Whole–Language High Jinks: How to Tell When 'Scientifically–Based Reading Instruction' Isn't": https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED498005.pdf

[3] Hoover, W. and Gough, P. (1990). The simple view of reading. Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 2, 127–160. https://www.academia.edu/22075542/The_simple_view_of_reading; Gough, P. and Tunmer, W. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. Remedial and Special Education, 7, 6–10. http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.905.7606&rep=rep1&type=pdf

[4] Scarborough, Hollis S. (2001) "Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice": https://www.academia.edu/22075542/The_simple_view_of_reading

[5] Student Achievement Partners, "Understand – The Shifts": https://achievethecore.org/category/419/the–shifts

[6] Hirsch, E.D. Jr., "The Case for Bringing Content into the Language Arts Block and for a Knowledge–Rich Curriculum Core for all Children," *American Federation of Teachers*: https://www.aft.org/periodical/american–educator/spring–2006/building–knowledge