

Introduction to Guided Reading



The following level-by-level continuum contains detailed descriptions of ways readers are expected to think *within*, *beyond*, and *about* the texts they are processing. We have produced the A-Z continuum to assist teachers who are using a gradient of texts to teach guided reading lessons or other small-group lessons. It may also be helpful as you confer with individual students during independent reading.

Guided reading is a highly effective form of small-group instruction. Based on assessment, the teacher brings together a group of readers who are similar enough in their reading development that they can be taught together. They read independently at about the same level and can take on a new text selected by the teacher that is just a little more challenging. The teacher supports the reading in a way that enables students to read a more challenging text with effective processing, thus expanding their reading powers. The framework of a guided reading lesson is detailed in Figure I-3.

General Aspects of the Continuum

As you use the continuum, there are several important points to keep in mind.

1. *The cognitive actions that readers employ while processing print are essentially the same across levels. Readers are simply applying them to successively more demanding levels of text.* Beginning readers are sorting out the complex concepts related to using print (left-to-right directionality, voice-print match, the relationships between spoken and written language), so their processing is slower and their overt behaviors show us how they are working on print. They are reading texts with familiar topics and very simple, natural language, yet even these texts demand that they understand story lines, think about characters, and engage in more complex thinking such as making predictions.

For higher-level readers, most of the processing is unconscious. These readers automatically and effortlessly solve large numbers of words, tracking print across complex sentences that they process without explicit attention to the in-the-head actions that are happening. While reading, they focus on the meaning of the text and engage in complex thinking processes (for example, inferring what the writer is implying but not saying, critically examining the ideas in the text, or noticing aspects of the writer's craft). Yet at times, higher-level readers will need to closely

FIG. 1-3. Framework for Guided Reading

STRUCTURE OF A GUIDED READING LESSON

| Element | Potential Teaching Moves to Support Reading with Comprehension and Fluency | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|-----------------|--------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------|---|----------------|-----------------------|-------------|---|--------------|
| Introduction to the Text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activate and/or provide needed background knowledge. • Invite students to share thinking. • Enable students to hear and sometimes say new language structures. • Have students say and sometimes locate specific words in the text. • Help students make connections to present knowledge of texts, content, and experiences. • Reveal the structure of the text. • Use new vocabulary words in conversation to reveal meaning. • Prompt students to make predictions based on the information revealed so far. • Draw attention to the writer's craft to support analysis. • Draw attention to accuracy or authenticity of the text—writer's credentials, references, or presentation of evidence as appropriate. • Draw attention to illustrations—pictures, charts, graphs, maps, cutaways—and the information they present. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Reading the Text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate, prompt for, or reinforce the effective use of systems of strategic actions (including word solving, searching for and using information, maintaining fluency, detecting and correcting errors, summarizing, and adjusting reading). • Prompt for fluency and phrasing. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Discussing the Meaning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather evidence of comprehension by observing what students say about the text. • Invite students to pose questions and clarify their understanding. • Help students learn to discuss the meaning of the text together. • Extend students' expression of understandings through questioning, summarizing, restating, and adding to their comments. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Teaching for Processing Strategies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit the text to demonstrate or reinforce any aspect of reading, including all systems of strategic actions: <table border="0" style="margin-left: 20px;"> <tr> <td>• Solving words</td> <td>• Predicting</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Monitoring and checking</td> <td>• Making connections</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Searching for and using information</td> <td>• Inferring</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Remembering information—(summarizing)</td> <td>• Synthesizing</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Maintaining fluency</td> <td>• Analyzing</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Adjusting reading—(purpose and genre)</td> <td>• Critiquing</td> </tr> </table> • Provide explicit demonstrations of strategic actions using any part of the text that has just been read. | • Solving words | • Predicting | • Monitoring and checking | • Making connections | • Searching for and using information | • Inferring | • Remembering information—(summarizing) | • Synthesizing | • Maintaining fluency | • Analyzing | • Adjusting reading—(purpose and genre) | • Critiquing |
| • Solving words | • Predicting | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| • Monitoring and checking | • Making connections | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| • Searching for and using information | • Inferring | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| • Remembering information—(summarizing) | • Synthesizing | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| • Maintaining fluency | • Analyzing | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| • Adjusting reading—(purpose and genre) | • Critiquing | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Word Work (optional) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach any aspect of word analysis—letter-sound relationships, using analogy, or breaking words apart. • Have students manipulate words using magnetic letters or use white boards or pencil and paper to make or take apart words. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Extending the Meaning (optional) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use writing, drawing, or extended talk to explore any aspect of understanding the text. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

examine a word to solve it or reread it to tease out the meaning of especially complex sentence structures.

All readers are simultaneously employing a wide range of systems of strategic actions while processing print. These include:

- *Solving the words using a flexible range of strategies.* Early readers are just beginning to acquire ways of looking at words, and they work with a few signposts and word features (simple letter-sound relationships and word parts). High-level readers employ a broad and flexible range of word-

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solving strategies that are largely unconscious, freeing attention for deep thinking.

- **Self-monitoring their reading for accuracy and understanding and self-correcting when necessary.** Beginning readers will overtly display evidence of monitoring and self-correcting while higher-level readers keep this evidence “underground”; but readers are always monitoring, or checking on themselves as they read.
- **Searching for and using information.** Beginning readers will overtly search for information in the letters and words, the pictures, or the sentence structure; they also use their own background knowledge. Proficient readers pick up information quickly and “in the head” so it usually cannot be observed.
- **Remembering information in summary form.** Summary implies the selection and reorganization of important information. Readers constantly summarize information as they read a text, thus forming prior knowledge with which to understand the rest of the text; they also remember this summary information long after reading.
- **Sustaining fluent, phrased reading.** At early levels (A, B, C), readers will be working to match one spoken word to one written word and will usually be pointing crisply at each word to assist the eye and voice in this process; however, even at level C, when dialogue is first presented, they will begin to make their reading sound like talking. As the finger is withdrawn and the eyes take over the process at subsequent levels, children will read increasingly complex texts with appropriate rate, word stress, phrasing, and pausing in a smoothly operating system. In and of itself, fluency is not a stage or level of reading. Readers apply strategies in an integrated way to achieve fluent reading at every level after the early behaviors are in place. Fluency is an important aspect of effective reading at all levels after C.
- **Adjusting reading in order to process a variety of texts.** At all levels, readers may slow down to problem solve words or complex language and resume a normal pace, although at higher levels this process is mostly unobservable. Readers make adjustments as they search for information; they may reread, search graphics or illustrations, go back to specific references in the text, or use specific readers’ tools. At all levels, readers also adjust expectations and ways of reading according to purpose, genre, and previous reading experiences. At early levels, readers have only beginning experiences to draw on, but at more advanced levels, they have rich resources in terms of the knowledge of genre (see Fountas and Pinnell 2006).
- **Making predictions.** At all levels, readers constantly make and confirm or disconfirm predictions. Usually, these predictions are implicit rather than

voiced, and they add not only to understanding but also to enjoyment of a text. All readers predict based on the information in the text and their own background knowledge, with more advanced readers bringing a rich foundation of knowledge, including how many varieties of texts work.

- ***Synthesizing new information.*** At all levels, readers gain new information from the texts they read, although beginning readers are processing texts on very familiar topics. As they move through successive levels of text, readers encounter much new information, which they incorporate into their own background knowledge.
- ***Making connections.*** At all levels, readers use their prior knowledge as well as their personal experiences and knowledge of other texts to interpret a text. As they expand knowledge through reading experience, they have more information to help them understand every text. At the most advanced levels, readers are required to understand mature and complex ideas and themes that are in most cases beyond their personal experience; yet they can empathize with the human condition, drawing from previous reading.
- ***Reading "between the lines" to infer what is not explicitly stated in the text.*** To some degree, all texts require inference. At very simple levels, readers may infer characters' feelings (surprised, happy, sad) or traits (lazy, greedy). But at high levels, readers need to infer constantly to understand both fiction and nonfiction texts.
- ***Thinking analytically about a text to notice how it is constructed or how the writer has crafted language.*** Thinking analytically about a text means reflecting on it, holding it up for examination, and drawing some conclusions about it. Readers at early levels may comment that the text was funny or exciting; they do not, however, engage in a great deal of analysis, which could be artificial and detract from enjoying the text. More advanced readers will notice more about how the writer (and illustrator when appropriate) has organized the text and crafted the language and this kind of analysis often enhances enjoyment.
- ***Thinking critically about a text.*** Thinking critically about a text involves complex ways of evaluating it. Beginning readers may simply say what they like or dislike about a text, sometimes being specific about why; but increasingly advanced readers engage in higher-level thinking as they evaluate the quality or authenticity of a text.

2. Readers are always meeting greater demands at every level because the texts are increasingly challenging. The categories for these demands may be similar, but the specific challenges are constantly increasing. For example, at many of the lower levels of text, readers are challenged to use phonogram patterns (or

consonant clusters and vowel patterns) to solve one-syllable words. At upper levels, they are challenged to use these same patterns in multisyllable words. In addition, at every level after E readers must use word endings as they take apart words. Word endings change words and add meaning. At lower levels, readers are attending to endings such as *-s*, *-ed*, and *-ing*, but as words become increasingly complex at successive levels, they will encounter endings such as *-ment*, *-ent*, *-ant*, *-ible*, and *-able*.

At all levels, readers must identify characters and follow plots; but at lower levels, characters are one-dimensional and plots are a simple series of events. Across the levels, however, readers encounter multiple characters that are highly complex and change over time. Plots have more episodes; subplots are full of complexity.

3. Readers' knowledge of genres expands over time but also grows in depth within genres. For some texts at very low levels, it is difficult to determine genre. For example, a simple repetitive text may focus on a single topic, such as fruit, with a child presenting an example on each page. The pages could be in just about any order, except that there is often some kind of conclusion at the end. Such a text is organized in a structure characteristic of nonfiction, which helps beginning readers understand information presented in categories, but it is technically fiction because the narrator is not real. At this level, however, it is not important for children to read pure genre categories, but simply to experience and learn about a variety of ways to organize texts.

Moving across the levels of the gradient, however, examples of genres become more precise and varied. At early levels, children read examples of fiction (usually realistic fiction, traditional literature, and simple fantasy) and simple informational texts on single topics. Across the levels, nonfiction texts become more and more complex, offering information on a variety of topics, as well as a range of underlying structures for presentation (description; comparison and contrast; cause and effect; temporal sequence; and problem and solution). These underlying structures appear at all levels after the very beginning ones, but they are combined in increasingly complex ways.

4. At each level, the content load of texts becomes heavier, requiring an increased amount of background knowledge. Content knowledge is a key factor in understanding texts; it includes vocabulary and concepts. Beginning texts are necessarily structured to take advantage of familiar content that most young children know; yet, even some very simple texts may require knowledge of some labels (for example, *zoo animals*) that are unfamiliar to the children. Effective reading at successively more difficult levels will depend not only on study in the content areas but on wide reading of texts that expand the individual's vocabulary and content knowledge.

5. *At each level, the themes and ideas are more mature, requiring readers to consider perspectives and understand cultures beyond their own.* Children can connect simple themes and ideas to their own lives, but even at beginning levels they find that their experiences are stretched by realistic stories, simple fantasy, and traditional tales. At levels of increasing complexity, readers are challenged to understand and empathize with characters (and the subjects of biography) who lived in past times or in distant places and who have very different perspectives from the readers' own. At higher levels, fantasy requires that readers understand completely imaginary worlds. As they meet greater demands across the levels, they must depend on previous reading, as well as on discussions of the themes and ideas.

6. *The specific descriptions of thinking within, beyond, and about text do not change dramatically from level to level.* As you look at the continuum of text features along the gradient A to Z, you will see only small changes level to level. The gradient represents a gradual increase in the demands of texts on readers. Similarly, the expectations for readers' thinking change gradually over time as they develop from kindergarten through grade eight. If you look at the demands across two or three levels you will notice only a few changes in expectations. But if you contrast levels like the following, you will find some very clear differences.

- Level A with Level D
- Level E with Level H
- Level I with Level N
- Level O with Level R
- Level S with Level U
- Level V with Level Z

The continuum represents progress over time, and if you examine the expectations in the ranges suggested, you get a picture of the remarkable growth our students make over kindergarten through grade eight.

Using the Continuum

The guided reading continuum is organized by level, A to Z. Each level has several sections.

Section 1: Characteristics of Readers

The first section provides a brief description of what you may find to be generally true of readers at the particular level. For a much more detailed description, see