

# How to Build Lifelong Readers

## Cognitive

Building vocabulary and comprehension



## Physical

Developing silent reading fluency and stamina



## Emotional

Increasing interest, confidence, and motivation



## Integrate, Don't Isolate the Three Domains of Reading

### Developing Successful Readers: Refocus on the Three Domains

Our education system invests heavily in developing students into successful, independent readers. Yet, despite the promise of technologies like digital content, big data, and personalized learning platforms, the results are disappointing. Research shows that, when reading independently, today's students struggle more and comprehend less than their peers did in 1960. [RRQ Research Study](#)

What are we missing?

Yes, technology can help develop skills. But, focusing on reading as a set of discrete, separate skills to be mastered ignores how students actually experience reading.

When students read independently their physical skills, cognitive abilities, and emotions are all working simultaneously. Yet most reading programs focus on only one of these three domains and try to develop it by isolating it from the others. It's not working.

We've lost focus on how and why students read and it has reduced our ability to develop successful readers. It's time to remind ourselves of the three domains of reading, and the power of integrating them in reading instruction.

*Today's independent readers are struggling more and comprehending less*



“It’s not only about becoming faster and more efficient in independent, silent reading. It’s doing it with comprehension, and with the ultimate goal of acquiring knowledge and enhancing personal interests.”

Dr. P. David Pearson, *Chairman, LA Literacy Research Panel*



## Physical

### The Essential, Yet Overlooked Key to Fluency and Stamina

Reading begins with a physical skill – the visual processing of text. When our eyes move across lines of print, we extract the features of that text and process it to construct meaning.

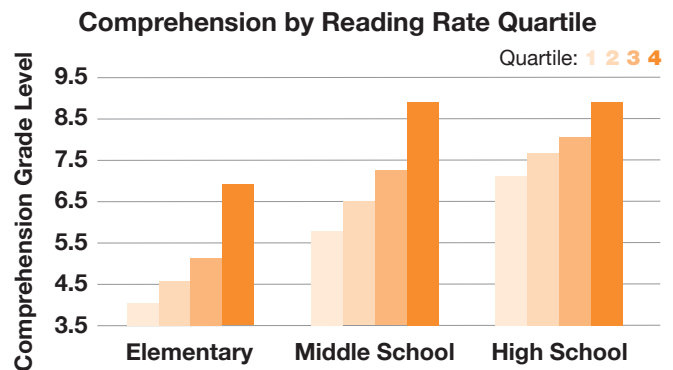
This physical skill doesn't come naturally to everyone. Students who labor to read haven't yet developed it and fall behind in vocabulary and comprehension. They spend their energies trying to process words and have little left for comprehension and even less for developing their interests.

Readers must efficiently navigate their eyes across lines of print in order to develop the fluency and stamina that ultimately, allow them to increase comprehension. Research shows the link between physical efficiency and comprehension.

[Read Research Brief](#)

Yet, most reading programs ignore this essential building block of reading, leaving students to continually labor, grow increasingly frustrated, and ultimately, lose interest in reading.

***Students who developed their physical efficiency skills had higher comprehension levels***



## Cognitive

### The Dominant Domain, Too Often Misunderstood

An emphasis on vocabulary and comprehension has dominated both the theory and practice of reading instruction for decades. Most approaches assume any performance improvement begins and ends with instruction and leveled practice. This is why many reading programs simply provide leveled texts, ask students to read and re-read, and then test for progress.

However, leveled texts often do not match student needs. Research shows vocabulary complexity is the best indicator of text complexity. Yet most readability measures use formulas that emphasize sentence length. So, a text with shorter sentences can have a lower readability level, even when its vocabulary is more appropriate for a higher level reader. In fact, it's possible to manipulate the readability level of text by keeping the same vocabulary and simply shortening the sentences. Shorter sentences might lower a readability score, but do nothing to change the cognitive demands placed on the reader if the vocabulary complexity is too high.

A reading program may declare a successful "match" of reader and text, but, in fact, has given the student a text that is overly complex due to the vocabulary. The result – the student struggles, falls behind, and loses interest in reading.

***Text with shorter sentences can have a low Lexile level, even when its vocabulary is more appropriate for a higher level reader.***

#### Lexile = 900

We do not simply cut sentences because this is what happens. A Lexile can change if you play around with sentences. We work in a different way because we know vocabulary is critical (since it is the better predictor of comprehension).

Our sentence lengths are appropriate and they increase in length as students advance through the program.

Mean Sentence Length = 14.25  
Vocabulary Difficulty = **3.62**

#### Lexile = 230

We do not simply cut sentences. Because this is what happens. A Lexile can change. If you play around with sentences. We work in a different way. Because we know vocabulary is critical. Since it is the better predictor of comprehension.

Our sentence lengths are appropriate. And they increase in length as students advance through the program.

Mean Sentence Length = 5.70  
Vocabulary Difficulty = **3.62**



## Emotional

### Student Interest Drives Confidence, Motivation, and Achievement

Measures of student interest correlate highly with academic performance. However, students most in need of improvement are rarely given opportunities to bring their personal interests into their reading practice. Instead, most reading programs focus on isolated cognitive skill development.

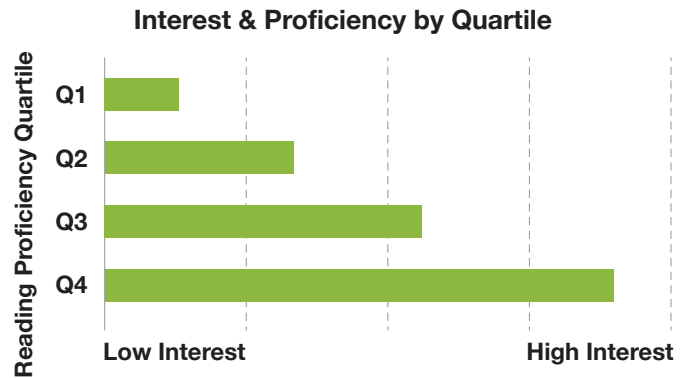
Ignoring student interests during reading development, essentially guarantees a lower level of student engagement in reading. And students who aren't engaged don't get the chance to discover reading as the way to learn more about who they are and who they can become.

Research shows the fundamental link between higher student interest and higher performance.

[Read Research Brief](#)

Students who read what they like are more interested and engaged in reading; more interested and engaged students become better readers; and better readers become lifelong readers.

*Reading programs that ignore student interests essentially guarantee a lower level of student engagement*



# To build lifelong readers, integrate, don't isolate skill development

When students read independently, they don't engage with each domain of reading in isolation from the others. They engage with all three simultaneously – and effective reading instruction must do the same.

It must build essential physical skills, provide the personalized, leveled content that best develops cognitive skills, and tap into students' interests to build confidence and motivation.

Reading Plus' Integrated Reading System simultaneously develops all three domains of reading. Each student gets what they need, when they need it, at the pace that works best for them.

Integrating reading skills – it's the research-proven way to help students become not just better readers, but lifelong readers.



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