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ABSTRACT
                 A series of nine booklets was developed to help
members of textbook adoption committees, teacher educators, inservice
leaders, and policymakers gather information, develop evaluation
guidelines, and organize their findings as they select new reading
programs and evaluate existing ones. Each booklet focuses on a
specific aspect of instruction. Titles include: Beginning Reading and
Decoding Skills; Comprehension I: The Directed Reading Lesson;
Comprehension II: Skills and Strategies; Reading and Writing
Instruction; Selections in the Basal Reader; Tests on Basal Reading
Programs; Vocabulary Instruction; and Workbooks. Following the same
organizational pattern, the booklets each begin with a brief
discussion of findings from research and effective practice. This
information is then used in the booklets as the basis for guidelines
that focus attention on specific areas or points. Next, a teacher
assistance section offers suggestions for ways to incorporate the
booklet's information into instruction. Finally, a set of worksheets
provides a means for organizing evaluation findings. A leader's
manual contains instructions for the guide's use, as well as general
information about basal reading programs and the textbook adoption
procedure. (Author/MG)

LEADER'S MANUAL

**A Guide to Selecting
Basal Reading Programs**

LEADER'S MANUAL

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Basal Reading Programs**

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Introduction

The Adoption Guidelines Project of the Center for the Study of Reading created *A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs* to assist textbook adoption committees with the difficult task of evaluating and selecting basal reading programs. Specifically, the *Guide* is designed to provide committees with research- and practice-based information about various aspects of reading programs and to give them an efficient means of organizing and recording their findings as they evaluate those programs.

The *Guide* is *not* intended to support or refute any particular philosophy of reading or approach to instruction. Nor do the booklets in the *Guide* address *all* topics that should be considered in evaluating reading programs. Rather, each booklet focuses on a topic that is of major importance to reading instruction, and that has a sufficient body of information from research and practice to summarize. For example, although illustrations are a feature of every basal reading program, the research about the appropriateness, type, and amount of illustrations and their effects on comprehension is limited. Another topic of interest to some users of basal reading programs is management systems. Again, the research about these systems and their use is insufficient to warrant a booklet about them.

The booklets in the *Guide* have been "tried out" by a number of committees in various parts of the country. As a coordinator of the Adoption Guidelines Project, I quickly learned that the booklets were most useful to those committees that had members willing to read them, discuss their content among themselves, and refer to their guidelines as they examined reading programs.

It also soon became clear to me that the booklets do not "save" committees work, rather, they create it. What was gratifying, however, was that the committee members usually felt that the extra effort they put forth was worthwhile. As one committee leader observed, "What I found, as exciting as you can get in curriculum I suppose, was that the committee's judgments reflected the background of information that the *Guide* provided. They were made in terms of that background information. I think the *Guide* raised to a higher level the discussion about what was important in our reading selections."

I believe that members of committees who conscientiously use the *Guide* in their textbook adoption process will have similar positive results. They will know more about effective reading instruction and feel more confident in the decisions they have made and the reading programs they have selected for their students.

Janice A. Dole

Acknowledgements

Since its beginnings, many people have participated in the Adoption Guidelines Project. We are especially grateful for the help and support given by the following people

Several years ago, the Center for the Study of Reading began the Adoption Guidelines Project Based on the premise that sound evaluation criteria are powerful tools — often underemployed — for improving the quality of instructional materials, the Project undertook the development of a set of booklets containing guidelines and procedures that adoption committees could use in their evaluation of basal reading programs The result is *A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs*

A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs is a series of booklets designed to incorporate important findings from research on teaching and learning into the textbook evaluation process. An additional goal of the *Guide* is to assist in making that evaluation procedure more objective

The *Guide* booklets are intended primarily for use by textbook adoption committees, but they will also be useful to directors of training and staff development programs, to school boards and state departments of education, and to teacher educators Because each booklet contains an overview of recent research on a topic central to reading instruction, the *Guide* will also be valuable as a tool for inservice training of teachers.

Most specifically, however, the booklets are intended to 1) help textbook adoption committees organize the evaluation process by focusing attention on some important issues involved in effective reading instruction, 2) provide guidelines that committees can use when evaluating the content and instructional quality of basal reading programs, and 3) provide a procedure that will help committees both to analyze the content of programs and to record their findings in a useful way.

The *Guide* contains eight booklets as well as this leader's manual Each booklet discusses a specific topic particularly relevant to the content of basal reading programs The booklet titles are.

- Beginning Reading and Decoding Skill
- Comprehension I· The Directed Reading Lesson
- Comprehension II Skills and Strategies
- Reading and Writing Instruction
- Selections in the Basal Reader
- Tests in Basal Reading Programs
- Vocabulary Instruction
- Workbooks

Because common sense and good teaching practice dictate that students must read from a variety of materials, not just their basal textbooks, and because research has documented that many students think reading is something that is done only with school textbooks (1), the *Guide* also includes a booklet entitled *Suggestions for the Classroom Teachers*

and Independent Reading. Independent Reading is intended to supplement the guidelines booklets. It provides suggestions for ways teachers can motivate students to do more independent reading, arrange class time for independent reading, set up classroom libraries, and establish schoolwide reading programs

THE NEED FOR A GUIDE TO SELECTING BASAL READING PROGRAMS

To understand the need filled by *A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs*, it is first necessary to review the role basal reading programs play in American classrooms and to look at the process of textbook selection.

The Role of Basal Reading Programs in American Classrooms

Studies conducted over the past twenty-five years indicate that commercially developed basal reading programs determine the reading curriculum and the mode of reading instruction in the classrooms of many American elementary schools (2, 10, 18, 19, 24). These classroom observations have shown that the content of the student textbooks, workbooks, and other materials associated with reading programs often comprises the bulk, if not the total, of what many students read, both in and out of school. Some of these studies also reveal that many teachers use and follow closely the teachers' manuals that accompany the reading programs (10, 18, 24) In addition, there is a strong connection between what is taught in these programs and the tests that are used to evaluate both reading instruction and the students getting the instruction.

Problems with basal reading programs In recent years, however, research has pointed to some problems with basal reading programs Researchers have documented, for example, the adverse effect of readability formulas on the comprehensibility of textbooks, the problems associated with workbooks, and the difficulties caused by unclear directions in teachers' manuals (3, 4, 7, 11, 12).

In the past few years, basal reading programs have also been criticized by some whole language advocates (17). They maintain that basal programs typically present reading, writing, speaking, and listening as separate "skills," which is antithetical to the whole language goal of integration. In addition, they argue that children should read authentic texts, and that the selections in basal readers often lack authenticity.

While basal reading program publishers have responded to these criticisms and have indicated an interest in making research- and practice-based changes in their programs, they are often reluctant to make major changes without some evidence that teachers will accept them And, in fact, there is some evidence that teachers serving on adoption committees tend to select new programs that are most like their old ones (22). Because of this, publishers contend that the impetus for changes in reading programs must come from the textbook adoption committees that are responsible for evaluating and purchasing basal programs and from the teachers who will use them

Not all textbook adoption committee members, however, have sufficient background and training in evaluating textbooks to make effective demands for the kinds of changes

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research and practice suggest are necessary. In addition, the task of adoption committees is made very difficult by the massive amount of materials they must review — a typical reading program contains a teacher's manual that may have 600 or more pages — and there are the student textbooks, workbooks, skill sheets, charts, posters, and copymasters to consider as well. It's no wonder that a researcher who analyzed six new editions of basal reading programs concluded: "Just what's a teacher supposed to do with all this?" (13) And, in fact, just how *do* adoption committees deal with all this?

The Textbook Selection Process

The selection of reading programs usually is conducted by means of a process labeled, aptly enough, textbook adoption. Where that process begins, however, depends upon where the members of an adoption committee live.

In some states, called adoption states, basal reading programs are first examined by a statewide adoption committee, which selects the programs that will appear on the state-approved list. Then the adoption committees of local school districts (and sometimes schools within districts), determine which of the approved programs they will use.

In other states, labeled by publishers as "open territory," reading programs are considered by committees representing entire school districts or individual schools within a district. Because there is no "state list," these committees can select from any program on the market.

Ideally, it would seem that adoption committees should examine and evaluate as many programs as possible. Then, using objective criteria, committee members would reach agreement about which materials were of the highest instructional quality and most suitable for the particular needs of the teachers and students in their district. That program would then be adopted. The reality, however, seems far from the ideal.

Problems with the selection process. A series of studies that examined the selection of basal reading programs indicated a number of problems with the selection process (6, 8, 9, 14, 16, 20, 21, 23). Some of these problems come from outside the committees, such as pressures from publishers' representatives and from particular vocal groups of citizens. There are also problems arising from inside the committees.

Problems associated with adoption committees include how committee members are selected, what groups are represented on the committees, and how the committees are organized to perform their tasks. In addition, committee members may work under a number of constraints. For example, those serving on committees often do not receive remuneration or even released time from their daily responsibilities.

Lack of time to complete evaluations is also a major problem. Committee members in several studies have commented on the relatively short period of time they were allocated to complete their work (6, 8, 9, 21). Additional problems arise when committees lack strong leadership and when committee members see their decisions overruled or ignored by "higher ups."

The use of inadequate evaluation tools can also be a serious problem in the selection process. Several researchers have commented on a tool adoption committees frequently use to examine materials — the checklist. Checklists containing criteria that have to do with a

number of aspects of the materials (for example, content of student textbooks, quality of illustrations, amount of comprehension instruction) are often devised by committees. The criteria on the checklists are what committee members consider as they examine the materials, the checklists are also the forms on which information about each publishers' materials is recorded.

A researcher who reviewed checklists from a number of school districts found them to be inadequate for evaluating the instructional quality of basal textbooks (5). She found, for example, that although 71% of the checklists examined included references to racial or sexual stereotyping, only 34% of the items referred to criteria about instructional quality.

Checklists can work very well in gathering some kinds of information, such as whether or not a program contains a certain feature. They also, however, can permit committee members to check off whether a skill or topic appears in a scope and sequence chart without examining the instructional quality of the skill or topic in the teacher and student materials (14). A checklist might, for example, include an item such as "develops higher level comprehension skills," but not define "higher level comprehension skills." Committee members might look in the scope and sequence charts, find "higher level comprehension skills "covered," and conclude that the program develops these skills. Given that *all* basal programs claim to develop higher level comprehension skills, such vague items cannot help evaluators differentiate one program from another. What the checklist item really evaluates is the appearance of the topic on a scope and sequence chart, not how well it is translated into instruction or other learning experiences.

IMPROVING THE ADOPTION PROCESS

Given the problems with the adoption process that have been identified by research, how can the process be made more effective? Experiences with adoption committees, conversations with school administrators concerned with the adoption process, and a review of the literature on adoption suggest some answers. Information from all these sources indicates that improvement begins with sound procedures to guide the organization and operation of the adoption committee.

Adoption Committees

The procedures, membership, and policies of adoption committees differ from school district to school district. Effective committees, however, have in common strong leadership and informed, interested committee members.

Committee leaders. There is no substitute for an effective leader who can keep a committee on task. What follows is a look at some of the things effective leaders must do.

Provide expert advice. While committee leaders do not have to be reading experts, they must have access to someone who is. That person should assist the leader in answering questions committee members might have, and, equally important, in providing information that will upgrade the committee's knowledge about effective reading instruction.

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Divide the labor. Because examining and evaluating materials is so time-consuming, leaders should divide the work among subgroups of committee members — sometimes by grade level, sometimes by topic, sometimes by different publishers. This division of labor avoids the overwhelming task of having every member of the committee examine every topic at every grade level in every set of materials being considered for adoption.

Organize the data. By the time the examination process comes to a close, the subgroups will have compiled a mass of forms and data about the programs they have evaluated. Leaders must find ways to organize and synthesize this information. Leaders are also instrumental in determining how final decisions will be made and in ensuring that the information will be delivered to the administration and the rest of the district.

Make decisions binding. Finally, leaders of textbook adoption committees must see to it that adoption committee members have the power to make the final selection. When committee members go through a careful evaluation process to reach a decision, their decision must not be undermined by "higher up" administrators who decide, for whatever reasons, to ignore the committee's decision. It is up to the leader of the committee to make sure that statements of the administration's budgetary constraints and any other constraints are explicit. Assuming that committees operate within these constraints, and that their evaluation process is reasonable, committees' recommendations must be considered as binding. When this does not happen, adoption committees will very quickly lose the motivation to expend time and effort on the adoption process.

Committee members. The members of an adoption committee must be interested in reading and in research about reading. In addition, they must be willing to give the time and energy necessary to properly examine, evaluate, and select reading programs.

Committee members should represent a range of grades, years of teaching experience, and points of view about reading instruction. It is very important that the membership of a committee represent the instructional needs of *all* students in a school or district. Some researchers recommend that subcommittees should not be based on the usual grade-level divisions, but rather on areas of committee members' expertise or interest, for example, beginning reading instruction, comprehension instruction, selections in student textbooks, or higher order thinking skills (15). In any case, committee members should be able to provide specific evidence from the teachers' manuals, student readers, and workbooks to support their conclusions and recommendations to the entire committee.

Committee members must be willing to work with diverse personalities and to take part in the give-and-take activities that are not only essential to a group process, but also to the attainment of a group decision.

Once they are assembled and organized, most adoption committees follow some variation of these tasks:

- they gather information about reading research and about programs,
- they establish evaluation criteria,
- they examine and evaluate programs,
- they organize their evaluation findings, and then
- they select the programs that best match the criteria they established.

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A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs has been organized to help committees as they carry out these tasks. The remainder of this booklet focuses on how to use the Guide.

USING A GUIDE TO SELECTING BASAL READING PROGRAMS

Each booklet in the Guide is divided into six parts. Part One reviews research and practice about the booklet's topic, while Part Two discusses guidelines drawn from the research and practice that can be used to evaluate how well the topic is handled in particular basal programs. Part Three suggests ways teachers can incorporate the information in the booklet into their instructional program, and Part Four provides a list of the guidelines for use as a quick reference. Part Five contains worksheets for recording comments and evaluations as well as directions for using the sheets, and Part Six is the reference section.

Important information about the booklets is highlighted on the following sample pages. As these pages illustrate, the booklets in the Guide are specifically designed to help committee members perform their tasks of gathering information, developing evaluation criteria, and organizing evaluation findings.

Gathering information. The Research and Practice section of each booklet is designed to update committee members' knowledge about current research and practice in reading instruction. The section can be read by committee members before they begin their evaluations and can be referred to as needed throughout the evaluation process. Alternatively, one or more members can read the section and present the information to the rest of the committee. Another possibility is to have a reading expert such as a reading coordinator, a reading teacher, or a university professor, lead a discussion based on the information in the section.

Developing evaluation criteria. Even if committee members feel they have enough background information, they still need to determine the criteria they will use as they evaluate specific programs. The Guidelines section of each booklet provides research- and practice-based criteria for evaluating instruction. The section can be used as is, or committees can modify the guidelines depending on their particular needs and interests. Some committees may want to cover areas of instruction not mentioned in the guidelines. In such cases, they may use the existing guidelines as models for the development of their own criteria.

Organizing evaluation findings. Once committee members decide on their guidelines for evaluating programs, they need to have a systematic way of organizing and recording the information they find. The Worksheets section of each booklet provides materials that committee members can use in this effort. These worksheets can be used as they are, or they can be modified to suit the needs of different committees. Not all worksheets — nor even all the parts of each worksheet — need to be used.

PART ONE
Research and Practice

When students are given reading opportunities that excite and delight them as well as help them master the skills and strategies of reading, they are likely to become not just school readers but lifelong readers. Sadly, some students who can read choose not to; others see reading as just another school task. (3)

For many students, reading opportunities in school are tied to the basal reader or student textbook, which is the core of a basal reading program. Basal readers are usually anthologies that contain fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selections. Because these selections are the basic (and sometimes the only) reading fare of young students, you will want to pay particularly close attention to their instructional and literary quality as you choose a basal reading program.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide information that can assist you in determining the quality of basal reader selections.

THE BASAL READER AND READING INSTRUCTION

A basal reading program consists of teachers' manuals, workbooks, skillsheets, tests, and student textbooks that set forth a unified reading curriculum. The reading selections in a basal program, therefore, do not exist in isolation; they are part of an integrated instructional program. Accordingly, each selection should contribute to the unity of the program. The following discussion will look first at the role of basal reader selections in early reading instruction and then at instruction in selections for intermediate-grade students.

Basal Readers and Early Reading Instruction

Most program developers employ authors to write original selections for the early levels of their reading programs. The majority of these selections are simple stories. Developers use simple stories for at least two reasons. First, children enjoy stories, and so are motivated to read them. Second, by the time many children begin to read, they are already familiar with the elements and organizational patterns of stories from hearing nursery rhymes and fairy tales and from following simple stories in picture books. (5)

To reinforce and develop the word identification skills students are being taught, the stories for early levels of basal programs usually are written with a controlled vocabulary, featuring words chosen according to one—or both—of two criteria. 1) they are useful words that appear with frequency in the language and are thus likely to be in children's vocabularies

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Part One presents research- and practice-based information about various aspects of the booklet's topic.

Numbers in parentheses indicate the source of a statement or finding. All sources are listed in alphabetical order in Part Six

PART TWO
Discussion of Guidelines for Evaluating Comprehension Skills and Strategies Instruction

As the review of research and practice shows, ideas about how to teach comprehension have changed dramatically over the years. The guidelines presented in this section are intended to help you determine the extent to which the programs you are evaluating provide instruction that reflects recent developments emerging from research about reading comprehension, as well as from the practical wisdom derived from your own teaching expertise.

A Curriculum Overview

As we noted earlier, research has not substantiated the validity of any particular scope and sequence of comprehension instruction. Furthermore, no basal reading program can, or should, create a plan for teaching reading skills and strategies in which everything is taught simultaneously. Obviously, some skills and strategies will be taught before others, but the order in which they are taught matters in only some cases. For example, strategies such as determining importance, summarizing, using prior knowledge, drawing inferences, and self-monitoring can be taught at nearly every age or level too. What matters is that the presentation of skills and strategies reflects a logical progression in development, both within and across grade levels. Programs and teachers simply have to start somewhere and move toward something.

GUIDELINE 1 As you evaluate the comprehension instruction of a reading program, determine if it presents a logical progression in the cumulative development of its skills and strategies, both within and across grade levels.

In the traditional curriculum, the development of reading expertise is viewed as a mastery process in which each of the various reading skills or strategies is presented in a hierarchy. Students practice using a skill or strategy until they master it and then move on to another. Mastery of a list of skills and strategies is equated with reading comprehension. In the changing curriculum, however, the development of reading expertise is viewed as a process of growth rather than mastery. That is, what changes in comprehension instruction from level to level is not the skill or strategy itself, but the difficulty of the content to which the skill or strategy is applied and the facility with which readers are able to apply it.

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Part Two presents guidelines drawn from the discussion of research and practice.

Each guideline focuses on a specific aspect of the booklet's topic

PART THREE
Teacher Assistance for Comprehension Skills and Strategies Instruction

The suggestions that follow are based on research and effective practice. They are intended to help teachers incorporate the information provided in this booklet into their total instructional program.

1.   How can I help students develop comprehension strategies?

- Share your predictions, understandings, and misunderstandings of selections in the same way you ask the students to share theirs. This will demonstrate how you as a competent reader are also actively engaged in the comprehension process.

- Provide practice in choosing the most appropriate strategy for a specific type of text and for a specific purpose.

- Also provide practice by having students apply a specific strategy to several different kinds of reading selections, both fiction and nonfiction.

- Encourage students to talk themselves through their first independent attempts at applying a specific strategy. These efforts can assist them in focusing on the steps of the strategy as well as raising their awareness of what they are doing to construct meaning.

- Use peer tutoring or cooperative learning to give students practice in strategy application.

- Have students monitor their comprehension by asking themselves questions before reading, during reading, and after reading. Some suggestions for questions are:

  (Prereading)
  What is this about? What do I already know about this? Why do I need to read this? What do I think will happen?

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Part Three provides suggestions for ways teachers can use the information in the booklet in their classrooms.

PART FOUR
Listing of Guidelines for Evaluating Comprehension Skills and Strategies Instruction

GUIDELINE 1 As you evaluate the comprehension instruction of a reading program determine if it presents a logical progression in the cumulative development of specific skills and strategies, both within and across grade levels

GUIDELINE 2 As you evaluate the comprehension instruction of a reading program, determine if it reflects the application of skills and strategies to increasingly difficult content and to a variety of selection types

GUIDELINE 3 As you evaluate the comprehension instruction of a reading program determine if it provides review and practice opportunities in workbook activities, in the selections in student textbooks, in writing suggestions and assignments, and in extended reading opportunities

GUIDELINE 4 As you examine the comprehension activities in reading programs—regardless of how they are labelled—determine whether they contribute to the development of the three important factors of

- determining what is important
- synthesizing information
- drawing inferences

GUIDELINE 5 As you examine comprehension instructional approaches in basal programs look for *explicit*, or *direct*, instruction that includes aspects of modeling and explanation guided practice and application

GUIDELINE 6 As you examine the comprehension instruction in reading programs look for activities that develop students metacognitive awareness

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Part Four lists in one place all of the guidelines discussed in Part Two so that they can be used as a handy reference

PART FIVE
Worksheets for Evaluating Comprehension Skills and Strategies Instruction

The job of evaluating comprehension skills and strategies instruction is not a simple one. However, the two worksheets that follow will help you examine those dimensions of reading lessons you believe to be important to your own comprehension instruction.

Specific directions for using the worksheets precede each one. General directions and some additional information about worksheets appear in the *Leader's Manual*.

Materials and Resources Needed

You will need one copy of each worksheet for every reading program you plan to evaluate. Reproduce as many copies as you need. For each level of comprehension instruction you plan to evaluate, you will also need:

- Teachers' manuals
- Student textbooks

Points to Keep in Mind

1. The worksheets are appropriate for all grade levels. However, you will find great variety in the way skills and strategies are laid out as you cross from primary to intermediate grades.

2. As you analyze the various comprehension activities of a program, you may find several skills or strategies that have not been discussed in this booklet. First, remember that this may be because different programs use different labels for the same skill or strategy. Then, discuss the importance of the skills or strategies included in the program.

3. Do not expect to fill in every column on each worksheet. Some parts may not apply to the specific program or task you are evaluating. Empty spaces do not necessarily mean a program is inadequate.

4. You may choose to use only parts of each worksheet.

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Part Five contains worksheets for use in organizing the information gathered in evaluating a reading program. It also provides directions for using the worksheets.

Worksheet　　　　　　　　　　　VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

Publisher ___　　　　Grade Level　　　　Program　　　　Copyright　　　　Evaluator

GUIDELINES 1 2
SELECTION AND SUSTAINED USE OF WORDS

TARGET LESSON					PRIOR LESSON	FOLLOW UP LESSON	Rating
Initial Reading	Key Words	Teacher's Manual Words	Overlapping Words	Workbook Skill Sheets			
PP		PP		PF			

GUIDELINES 3 4 5, 6
APPROACHES TO INSTRUCTION

Approach	Words Introduced	Comments on Teacher's Manual Activities	Comments on Workbook Skill Sheets Activities	Rating
Definitional				
Contextual				
Conceptual				
Mixed				
Other activities				
No specific instruction				

Sections of each worksheet relate to specific guidelines discussed in the booklet

Each worksheet provides space for you to record findings about guideline-related aspects of a reading program

Each worksheet contains space for you to record your own rating or comments about a particular part of a program.

PART SIX
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    reading comprehension What should be taught? How should it be taught?*
    Unpublished paper

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Part Six lists all of the sources used to prepare a booklet.

Sources are arranged alphabetically and numbered. They are cited by number in the text

Questions and Answers about the Booklets in the Guide

The booklets have been field tested with numerous textbook adoption committees throughout the country. Here are some questions that committee members frequently ask about them.

Should the booklets be used in any particular order?
No. The booklets are designed to be used independently. Sometimes, however, information in one booklet overlaps with information in another. In these cases, you may wish to refer to the related booklet.

What is the best way to use the booklets?
The booklets lend themselves most easily to a division of labor by areas of interest and expertise. The adoption committee can be broken down into small subcommittees — one group to be experts on comprehension, another on vocabulary, another on decoding, and so on. But while this particular approach often seems most appropriate, the booklets can be used in other ways as well. Committees need to choose what is most appropriate and efficient for them.

How much background in reading instruction is needed to understand the booklets?
The booklets are easy to read and understand even for those who have a very limited background in reading instruction. Some general knowledge about the organization of basal reading programs is helpful, but not essential.

Does a committee have to use all of the booklets?
Only the *Leader's Manual* should be read by everyone using the *Guide*. While we would like for you to use all of the booklets, we understand that because of various constraints, this will not always be possible. Therefore, we have designed each booklet so that it "stands alone." We suggest that a committee use as many as your needs and interests dictate.

How many basal reading programs should be evaluated with the Guide?
The answer to this question depends on the amount of time you have to complete the selection process — and the amount of money you have to spend on a program. Most of the school districts in our tryouts used some sort of screening procedure to reduce the number of programs to examine to five or fewer. This can be done by looking at publishers' brochures and advertisements and eliminating those programs that do not fit the district's philosophy or needs, as well as programs that cost more than a district has budgeted.

How many lessons must be examined in each program we evaluate?
The minimum requirement for the number of lessons per grade level usually appears in the directions that accompany the worksheets in each booklet. Depending on the size of your committee and the time you have available, you may want to examine more than the minimum number.

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Will the booklets answer all of a committee's questions about the strengths and weaknesses of basal programs?

No. The booklets include a great deal of important information about reading instruction as it relates to basal reading programs. There are, however, some reading topics and components of basal reading programs that are not covered in the booklets, generally because there presently is insufficient information from research or practice to warrant an entire booklet on the subjects

OTHER USES OF THE BOOKLETS

The booklets in *A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs* provide a well-organized package for inservice training on research, theory, and practice relevant to reading instruction. The booklets emphasize the most recent advances in knowledge about reading and are therefore a source of information that teachers, administrators, and others interested in effective reading instruction can use and re-use long after basal reading programs have been selected

Curriculum leaders in school districts can use the booklets as resource material for staff development programs. These leaders can ask teachers to

- read the booklets as part of an inservice training program
- use the booklets to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the reading program(s) currently in use in the districts
- use the booklets to determine ways to strengthen the district's reading program
- use the references at the back of the booklets for further study of topics in reading instruction

Teacher trainers can use the booklets for required or optional reading in their courses Trainers can ask students to

- use the booklets to study particular topics considered important to a reading program
- use the worksheets at the back of the booklets to examine and evaluate particular basal reading programs
- use the booklets to determine which components of basal programs need to be supplemented with teacher-directed instruction or with additional materials
- use the references at the back of the booklets for further study of topics in reading instruction

Finally, the booklets can serve as a model for those interested in developing guidelines for evaluating textbooks in other subject areas, such as science social studies, and mathematics Many of the recommendations and procedures outlined in the booklets can be applied to these textbooks as well

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BEGINNING READING AND DECODING SKILL

**A Guide to Selecting
Basal Reading Programs**

CONTENTS

PART ONE
Research and Practice

The nature and content of reading instruction in kindergarten, first-, and second-grade classrooms is usually a topic of major importance to teachers serving on textbook adoption committees. Teachers know the importance to success in reading of these first years of schooling. And research confirms their insights. Studies comparing the reading achievement of children at the end of first grade with their achievement in latter grades establish that how well children "catch on" to reading in the first grade strongly predicts how well they will read during the remainder of their school years (37). An obvious question follows from this information. How can reading instruction be organized in kindergarten and first grade so that by the end of this period, all children will be well on their way to being capable readers?

Answers to this question abound, the problem is that there is not much agreement among the answers. In fact, beginning reading instruction is a topic loaded with potential for controversy. On the one hand, the research of the past decade reveals a great deal of information about the reading process that has many implications for reading instruction. In addition, several popular classroom-based movements such as whole language and literature-based reading also have implications for reading instruction. On the other hand, there exist a number of well-entrenched beliefs and ideas about how young children should be introduced to reading. Firmly held opinions on this topic are not confined to classroom teachers and reading researchers. Parents concerned about the reading achievement of their own children, politicians worried about the achievement of the children in their constituencies, "experts" convinced they have the right answer to all of the problems of reading instruction, and concerned citizens dedicated to improving education in their communities—all have strong opinions about how children should be taught to read.

Evaluators of basal reading programs must find their way through this mass of information, belief, conviction, and opinion—and sometimes heavy-handed pressure—to make informed decisions about beginning reading instruction. The research-based information in this booklet is intended to help adoption committees meet that challenge. *In no way does the booklet attempt to deal with, let alone resolve, all of the controversies about beginning reading instruction.* It does however, discuss some of the issues that frequently concern people evaluating beginning reading instruction, and it reviews research that sheds some light on these issues.

The primary sources for the content of this booklet are two major reports about beginning reading that have been disseminated by the Center for the Study of Reading *Becoming a Nation of Readers The Report of the Commission on Reading,* and *Beginning to Read Thinking and Learning about Print A Summary* [1] Each of these reports contains a

comprehensive review and interpretation of a wide range of research about beginning reading. The findings and recommendations of the reports are drawn upon freely throughout this booklet. It is recommended that at least one member of an adoption committee read these reports in their entirety.

It should be noted that, as its title suggests, this booklet focuses on the decoding aspects of beginning reading instruction. This focus should not be interpreted as diminishing the importance of comprehension, writing, or language development in beginning reading instruction. Two of the booklets in this series discuss the nature of reading comprehension and comprehension instruction. *Comprehension I. The Directed Reading Lesson* and *Comprehension II Skills and Strategies*. Another booklet, *Reading and Writing Instruction*, addresses writing. These booklets as well as others in the series, such as *Vocabulary Instruction, Selections in the Basal Reader*, and *Workbooks* also should be used along with this booklet when considering beginning reading instruction in basal reading programs.

WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED TO KNOW TO BECOME SUCCESSFUL READERS?

As teachers know, not all children respond equally well to beginning reading instruction. What makes some children successful readers while others struggle? Among the characteristics that have been found to relate to children's success in beginning reading are 1) word awareness, 2) phonemic awareness, 3) knowledge of letter names, and 4) print awareness. At one time or another, instruction related to these factors has been evident in the kindergarten and first-grade levels of most basal reading programs. The following review of the research about the importance of these characteristics should help evaluators better examine the content of the programs they are considering.

Word Awareness

Even though words seem obvious and accessible units of language to adults, there is evidence that they are not so for many young children, especially those who have had little experience with books and other forms of print. Awareness of both spoken words and words in print is key to reading success.

Spoken words. Evidence shows that children tend not to think of spoken language as being composed of words or to treat spoken words as individual units of meaning. Some children confuse "word" with "idea unit." For example, in one study, a number of young children identified only two words in the sentence "George went walking," *George* and *went walking* (39). In another study, some older children failed to separate prepositions and articles from content words in sentences like "Do you want to go to the store?" (29) This is not too surprising, since in speech word boundaries are often reduced ("Doya wanna go to the store?")

It is easy to see where these misunderstandings come from. In speaking and listening, children's attention is quite naturally focused on making sense out of the stream of words. For

them to focus instead on each individual word, syllable, or sound would be counterproductive. If children concentrated only on the single words or the sounds of spoken language, they would quickly lose track of the message. For the purposes of speaking and listening to language, therefore, it is a good thing that the processing of words and sounds is automatic. For the purposes of reading or writing, however, children must learn to pay attention to words as separate units.

Awareness of words in print. Children's ability to think of words as individual units is crucial if they are to gain insight into how written language works. If they were not able to do so, they would never master print. Indeed, it might be through their interest in print that many children do catch on to the concept of word. Print corresponds to speech, word by word. For many children this may be sufficient to create their word awareness.

Yet leaving children on their own to catch on to words can cause problems. For example, research has shown that some beginning readers do not understand the purpose of spaces between words as they read (48, 51). Furthermore, awareness of the relationship between the spoken and written lengths of words strongly divides reading-ready from reading-unready children. In a study in which kindergarten children were presented pairs of words, one long and one short, and told to choose the short word, only 10% of the reading-unready children could choose correctly on seven of eight of the pairs, whereas 43% of the reading-ready children met this criterion (59).

Phonemic Awareness

It is especially important for children to become aware of the sounds in spoken language. Not surprisingly, however, the smaller the unit of sound, the more difficult the task becomes. Awareness of words develops earlier and more easily than awareness of syllables. And awareness of syllables develops earlier and more easily than awareness of phonemes. Awareness of phonemes, although the most closely predictive of early reading success, seems to come only after a child is aware of the larger units (1).

Phonemes are the smaller-than-syllable sounds that correspond roughly to individual letters. Phonemic awareness is the name given the conscious knowledge that spoken words can be broken into phonemes and that these can be "moved around." This awareness seems to depend on a child's ability to focus on the sounds (as opposed to the meanings) of words.

Young children show that they are aware of phonemes when, for example, they amuse themselves with rhymes and alliterations. But such awareness need not be a conscious act. If children were always consciously aware of phonemes, that awareness would interfere with their ability to listen to speech. To understand speech, it is necessary to attend to the sense of spoken language but not its sounds. In fact, it is because they have so thoroughly automated their processing of phonemes that children can attend to and process the meanings of spoken language. Moreover, because they have learned their phonemes so well, there is almost no reason for children to give them conscious attention—no reason, that is, unless they want to learn to read an alphabetic language. The great irony is, that to learn to read an alphabetic language, children must learn to attend to that which they have learned so well *not* to attend to in their oral language understanding.

A great deal of research points to the importance of phonemic awareness to children's eventual success at reading (10). For example, in one study, reading achievement was significantly predicted three years later by a phonemic awareness task given to four and five year olds, even after differences in age and intelligence were taken into account (11). Further evidence for the importance of phonemic awareness comes from a training study conducted as part of the same research, which found that teaching children to compare the beginning, middle, and final sounds in spoken words dramatically improved their reading achievement, if such teaching were accompanied by instruction in how the sounds were represented by the alphabet

Knowledge of Letter Names

Children's knowledge of letter names has been shown by a number of studies to be the best predictor of beginning reading achievement (10) Before entering school, most children have learned to identify and name most of the letters of the alphabet—or at least most of the upper case letters (46, 47, 53) Learning about letters frequently turns into interest in their sounds and in the spelling of words (14), and that familiarity with letters is strongly related to the ability to remember the forms and spellings of written words (29, 30) It is not difficult to conclude that a comfortable knowledge of the letters of the alphabet is an important step to success in reading

Learning letter names. Children appear to learn letters at home by reciting the names of the letters long before they can recognize them There are three useful instructional points in this observation First, children who learn letters at home typically do not do so by having someone show them the letters then teach them the names Instead, most children are taught the letters only after they know their names Because they have thoroughly learned the names first, children have a "peg" on which to attach their knowledge. Second, the ability of young children to recite the alphabet is often achieved through learning the alphabet song Because of their rhyme and rhythm, songs are easier to learn than lists Third, these children most often learn the names of letters long before they are introduced to their sounds Their solid familiarity with letter names may protect them from confusing letters with sounds when the time to learn the sounds of the letters arrives

Letters and sounds. Children who enter school with little knowledge about letters are more likely to confuse letter names with the sounds of letters Although the sound of a letter is often similar to its name, there are important functional differences between the sound and name of a letter. To prevent such confusion, a few basal reading programs avoid the use of letter names altogether Instead they rely on the sounds of the letters for purposes of reference

Although well-intended, this practice must be implemented with care Because learning about the sounds associated with the letters is itself a difficult task, the pace of learning the identities of letters must be relatively slow in such programs. To support adequate overall progress, the curriculum must be carefully designed to maximize reading and writing activities with each letter that has been taught

Upper case and lower case letters. Eventually, of course, children must learn to recognize both upper case and lower case letters Which should be taught first? Research offers only one suggestion When working with children who have little or no letter recognition facility, teachers should not try to teach both upper and lower case versions of all

twenty-six letters at the same time (7). To teach two visually different letters with identical responses amidst fifty other often confusable forms with confusable sounds and labels will almost guarantee learning difficulties for some children.

In instruction for preschool children, the upper case letters should probably be taught first because they are visually more discriminable from one another (64) On the other hand, because the ability to recognize lower case letters is more important for reading text, instruction for first graders with little letter knowledge probably needs to give priority to the lower case letters

Printing letters. Learning to print is a powerful means of developing letter recognition skills. In addition, knowing how to print allows children to write words as soon as they are introduced. Therefore, encouraging children to print from the start of instruction is probably a good idea

Print Awareness

Children who know the names of letters before they begin school usually get that knowledge through exposure to print in a number of forms, including storybook reading, television, and alphabet books. From these experiences they have also learned how print functions and how it "works"—that it starts from the top left and goes to the b ..om right, that capital letters begin sentences, that periods end them, and so forth This knowledge of how print works also aids them in learning to read.

The importance of young children's awareness of print is becoming more recognized The performance of children on tests designed to measure concepts about print has been found to predict future reading achievement and to be strongly related to other, more traditional measures of reading readiness and achievement (66) Researchers have pointed out that awareness of the forms, functions, and uses of print provides not just the motivation but the backdrop against which reading and writing may best be learned (16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 56)

Other Possible Predictors of Reading Success

Some have suggested a number of other factors that might predict reading success, including perceptual skills Despite the energy invested in training various perceptual and motor skills, however, such training seems not to produce any measurable payoff in learning to read (3) Nonetheless, some reading programs still invest considerable time and effort into training these skills. Such training takes time away from experiences that *do* aid reading growth In short, programs that teach skills such as visual discrimination, especially of nonletter shapes, and auditory discrimination of nonspeech sounds should be avoided in favor of programs that provide children with experiences with words, speech sounds, letters, and stories

Others have suggested that children learn best if they are taught through their dominant perceptual modality—in other words, if teachers match the method of instruction to children's preferred modality Unhappily, this notion has not been supported by research Although many studies have been conducted on this subject, it does not seem, for example, that children classified as "auditory" benefit more from an auditory type of instruction than do those classified as "visual" (57)

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WHERE DO THESE CHARACTERISTICS ORIGINATE?

The importance of awareness of letter names, phonemes, words, and print reinforces the idea that growing familiarity with letter-sound correspondences and with the conventions of print is especially valuable to beginning readers. It is not clear, however, how such awareness can be acquired except through exposure to written words. What this says about reading readiness is that children's reading success in first grade depends largely on how much they already have learned about reading before they get there. How do young children acquire knowledge about reading? The answer may lie in their oral language experiences and in their exposure to rhymes, environmental print, and storybook reading

Oral Language and Listening Experiences

If children have a weak foundation in oral language, their progress in reading is likely to be slow and uncertain. To comprehend text readily, children should have some familiarity with the vocabulary they will find in their school texts. The ability to talk about and reflect upon the world around them is an indicator of their oral language proficiency

Oral language experiences in the classroom are important for all children, but they are especially so for children who come from homes where they do not habitually use language to reflect on their experiences and, therefore, have had fewer opportunities to develop the language processes needed for proficient reading (2). For these reasons, kindergarten instruction needs to capitalize on every opportunity to engage children in thoughtful discussion

Listening is a another aspect of oral language development. Listening comprehension proficiency in kindergarten and first grade is a moderately good predictor of the level of reading comprehension attained by the third grade (5). Therefore, kindergarten instruction should provide opportunities for children to listen as well as to speak. These opportunities can come in class discussions, in storybook reading, and in direction giving

Rhymes and Games

As indicated earlier, both letter knowledge and phonemic awareness contribute to beginning reading success. It seems, in addition, that some special magic lies in linking these two skills. *Beginning to Read* argues, for example, that understanding the alphabetic principle depends equally on knowledge of letters and on conscious awareness of phonemes because it depends so closely on the association between them. It suggests further that this link might be developed naturally when children play with word games, songs and poems with rhyme and rhythm, and especially nursery rhymes

Some researchers, in fact, have found that children's early knowledge of nursery rhymes seems to be specifically related to their awareness of sounds in spoken phonemes and words and of emergent reading abilities (44). By hearing and producing nursery rhymes, children are manipulating sounds in spoken words in a manner that is playful and natural

If phonemic awareness and later reading achievement are rooted in nursery rhymes, this suggests that some of the roots of literacy may be in such traditional rhymes and games as *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, *Humpty Dumpty*, and *Ring Around a Rosy*

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Environmental Print and Storybook Reading

Some have suggested that reading ability emerges out of children's interaction with print in their environment. Research has established, however, that the ability to read does not emerge magically and unaided, but through the active intervention of other children and adults who point out letters, words, and other print features in their environment—on signs, newspapers, television, boxes, tickets, and so on

One of the most important ways that children develop concepts about how print functions is simply through being read to. In fact, according to *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" Others have pointed to the importance of reading to children both regularly and interactively. From storybook reading, children gain not only a knowledge of how print is organized on a page, of letter names, and of concepts of "word," but they also get an understanding of *why* one reads. By reading to children from storybooks, parents and teachers can both bring children into the worlds of fantasy and absurdity and the problems and solutions that narratives contain, and they can point out that language is represented by print. Both the appreciation of the narrative and the simple concepts about how print works contribute to helping children become readers

Many children enjoy hundreds of hours of storybook reading and perhaps thousands of hours of overall literacy support during their preschool years. Yet many other children receive but a few minutes of storybook reading per year (62, 63). Such children grow up without being read to and without papers and pencils and books. How much do these children learn about print in their preschool years? *Beginning to Read* responds to this question as follows

> Research indicates that many such children approach school with very little
> print knowledge. They don't know what a letter or word is, much less how
> to read one. They don't know that print reads left-to-right, much less that it
> contains words and sentences. They don't know the front from the back of a
> book, much less that its print is meant to convey meaning

In short, they come to school unprepared to learn to read, for they don't yet know the form or function of reading. For these children, there is not a moment to waste in the classroom. Although they need explicit instruction about letters and sounds, this instruction should take place in a classroom full of print—on posters and charts, in notes and letters, and in storybooks. Research and common sense point to the value of regularly reading aloud to all children in kindergarten and the early grades (14, 25, 33, 36), but this is an especially valuable way of introducing the forms and functions of print to children who have not grown up with storybook reading.

FORMAL READING INSTRUCTION

The beginning of formal reading instruction in most basal reading programs is usually characterized by the start of systematic instruction in decoding. Although children benefit from systematic and early instruction in letter-sound correspondences, that instruction must also include useful comprehension activities and a variety of writing, spelling, listening, and

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spoken language activities (1). Too great an emphasis on letter-sound correspondences may give children the impression that the only purpose they have for reading is to sound out words. Children who begin formal reading instruction without a strong literacy background may be especially susceptible to such misinterpretations. However, programs with too little emphasis on letter-sound correspondences are not as effective as those that place a strong emphasis on decoding (2, 13). Balancing the various aspects of beginning reading instruction is essential

Word Recognition and Beginning Reading

Skillful reading is based on fast, accurate word identification (54). How, then, should children be taught to read words? The answer given by most reading educators today is that letter-sound instruction is one of the essential ingredients As *Becoming a Nation of Readers* notes, because all major commercial reading programs include lessons on sound-symbol relationships, the issue is no longer, as it once was, whether children should be taught such relationships Where there are disputes among educators today, they tend to be about whether teachers should instruct children directly in the relationships or whether children should be allowed to learn them through exposure to print

Letter-sound correspondences are important to learning to read because English is an alphabetic language in which there are consistent, if not always predictable, relationships between letters and sounds. When children learn these relationships well, most of the words in their spoken language become accessible to them when they see them in print That is, they can "break the code."

Classroom-based research shows that, on the average, children who are directly taught something about letter-sound correspondences get off to a better start in learning to read than children who are not (13) Research indicates that such instruction facilitates fast, accurate word identification Instruction in letter-sound correspondences is associated with phonics instruction

What is Phonics Instruction?

Phonics can be defined as instruction in the relationship between letters and speech sounds As *Becoming a Nation of Readers* so carefully states

The goal of phonics is not that children be able to state the "rules" governing letter-sound relationships Rather, the purpose is to get across the alphabetic principle, the principle that there *are* systematic relationships between letters and sounds Phonics ought to be conceived as a technique for getting children off to a fast start in mapping the relationships between letters and sounds

It follows that phonics instruction should aim to teach only the most important and regular of letter-to-sound relationships, because this is the sort of instruction that will most directly lay bare the alphabetic principle Once the basic relationships have been taught, the best way to get children to refine and extend their knowledge of letter-sound correspondences is through repeated opportunities to read

Virtually every reading program teaches phonics in some variety. Yet some programs term themselves "phonics" or "code" programs, whereas some do not use the word "phonics" at all. What are the differences in the way these programs present phonics instruction?

How Does Phonics Instruction Differ in Reading Programs?

Like beauty, what is meant by "phonics" is in the eye of the beholder. To some, phonics instruction is a mind-numbing array of worksheets assigned while the teacher is doing other things, divorced from any practice in real reading. To others, phonics instruction is a teacher sitting down with a group of children and directly initiating them into reading by revealing its code. To some, phonics is irrelevant. To others, it is essential. Phonics can be all of these things, and even in programs that claim not to teach phonics, phonics instruction can take place.

Approaches to phonics instruction can differ on a number of dimensions. The following discussion looks at only a few of these dimensions.

Analytic and synthetic approaches. Some approaches to the teaching of phonics are called *analytic*, or implicit, because they begin with whole words (generally previously learned as sight words) and help students to analyze their component parts. Other approaches are called *synthetic*, or explicit, because they begin with letters or clusters of letters and build words by blending the sounds of letters together.

Most basal reading programs present phonics instruction through an analytic approach. A typical analytic lesson to teach the short *a* sound in a consonant/vowel/consonant word, for example, begins with a key word, such as *cat*. The teacher instructs the students to listen for the vowel sound they hear in the middle of *cat*. They are told that this sound is the sound of the short *a*. The teacher then reads aloud and shows students several other short *a* words (such as *tan, ram, stamp,* and *last*) and says that these, too, have the short *a* sound in the middle. Then the teacher reads another list of words, some with and some without the short *a* sound, and asks students to identify those with the sound. In a similar activity with written words, students are asked to read words with and without short *a*. Finally, they complete worksheets, requiring them to fill in the letter "a" where appropriate, respond to sentences containing short *a* words, select from a set of words the one that names a given picture, or select the picture that goes with the word.

In such lessons, the teacher moves from a word the children already have learned to new words. Because some phonemes cannot be spoken in isolation—that is, without attaching another sound to them—the lessons instruct the teacher not to say sounds in isolation. The children are supposed to analyze the spoken words into their individual sounds. The problem is, as research has confirmed, that many children have difficulty doing so (41, 42). *Becoming a Nation of Readers* holds that children's ability to analyze words into their separate sounds may depend upon their having already learned something about the sounds associated with letters.

> For instance, children who do not already have some idea of the sounds of the letters in *sit* may not be able to single out the short */i/* sound when they hear the word spoken. Hence, when the teacher tells the children that the letter *i* "has the sound you hear in the middle of *sit*," they may not be able to

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make the connection. Ironically, therefore, implicit [analytic] phonics may actually presuppose what it is supposed to teach.

In programs using a synthetic, or explicit, approach to the teaching of phonics, instruction generally begins with isolated sounds. In addition, students must engage in activities in which they learn to blend the sounds into words. For example, the teacher might write the letter *a* on the board, say its sound, and have students repeat the sounds. Then the students blend together the *a* with the sounds of previously taught letters, such as *m, n, t,* or *r,* into words such as *man, am, Nan, tan,* and *rat* The problem with this approach is that, as noted above, some phonemes cannot be pronounced in isolation Most notably the "stop" consonants, such as /b/, /k/, /d/, /g/, require children to append a vowel sound, such as "uh," to produce "syllables" like *buh, kuh,* and *duh.* This can create problems when children try to blend a word like *barn* as "buh-a-ar-n-n-n"

So, which is best, analytic or synthetic phonics? Research provides no definitive answer, although the trend of findings favors synthetic phonics *Becoming a Nation of Readers* notes, for example, that the strategies of synthetic phonics—isolating the sounds associated with most letters and teaching children to blend the sounds of letters together to try to identify words—are useful instructional strategies However, the report concludes that, given the lack of research data to support one approach over the other, "Probably, the best strategy would draw from both approaches. For example, the sounds of some letters such as *r,* which are especially difficult to produce correctly in isolation, might be introduced best using the implicit approach "

Phonic generalizations and rules. Beginning reading programs also differ in the stress they place on phonic generalizations or rules, such as "when two vowels are together, they generally say the long sound of the first vowel and the second is silent " Such generalizations may serve to focus children on common spelling patterns in English, allowing them to see what letters generally occur together.

Most generalizations are about how to pronounce vowels And the problem with vowel generalizations is that they do not work very well The "two vowels walking" generalization, for example, has been found valid only about 45% of the time (It works with *bead* but not with *head*) (19) One study found that of forty-five commonly taught vowel generalizations, only twenty-three worked with as many as three-quarters of the words to which they pertained (19)

The goal of phonics lessons is fast, accurate recognition of words, not labored sounding out of words. Generalizations are useful only as they point out common spelling patterns For this purpose, they do not have to be memorized Further, generalizations should not be taught as hard and fast "rules" that govern letter-sound correspondences, but as ideas that can be applied flexibly For example, "If one sees two vowels together, first try to say the long sound of the first vowel, then the short" has much higher applicability than "When two vowels go walking ."

Unit of instruction Reading programs also differ in the units of instruction to which they call attention Many programs ask children to learn the relationship between *individual* letters and sounds, a few use *letter clusters* or spelling patterns as their basic units, and, of course, some use primarily the sight recognition of *words* Most programs, however, do some of each of these.

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Recently, researchers have looked into other components of spoken language called "onsets" and "rimes," which may prove to be a useful unit of instruction (65). An "onset" is the part of a syllable that precedes the vowel, the "rime" is the rest of the syllable. All syllables must have a rime, not all need an onset.

The concept of onsets and rimes may be useful in teaching written language. For example, in one study, young children were able to figure out the pronunciation of one word by analogy to another with the same rime (they could read *beak* given *peak*). By contrast, these children could not make any use of matching spellings and sounds that did not correspond to rimes (they could not read *beak* given *bean*) (34).

Teaching phonics in isolation. Another way that programs differ in phonics instruction is in how they present the relation between the word patterns taught and their appearance in context. Rather than a dichotomy among programs, there is a range of variation. Some programs provide a phonics lesson prior to the reading of a selection that has only a few words exemplifying the relationships. Others have phonics lessons that are followed by selections containing a high percentage of words with the taught relationships. According to *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, "The important point is that a high proportion of the words in the earliest selections children read should conform to the phonics they have already been taught. Otherwise they will not have enough opportunity to practice, extend, and refine their knowledge of letter-sound relationships." When phonics instruction is completely divorced from real reading practice, the danger is that it becomes pointless memorization.

Another aspect of this question is whether phonics in isolation should be taught at all. Most whole language theorists support the teaching of phonics only in the context of a whole story, and only as needed to understand a word in the story. Such "decoding-on-demand" instruction is usually unsystematic, but it may not be any more so than the instruction offered in a reading program that has an ill-planned scope and sequence and uses selections that do not contain words that permit children to apply newly taught letter-sound correspondences. This problem points up the importance of looking not only at the instruction given but at how the instruction relates to the other reading children do.

Teaching words in context. Many programs stress the use of context in identifying words. Although it is extremely important that words be practiced in passage context, over-reliance on context does not appear to be a useful practice in word identification. Good readers decode rapidly and automatically, using both their word identification skill and context. Younger and poorer readers tend to over-rely on context, partly because they do not have efficient word knowledge to use instead.

It is extremely important that children learn to identify words quickly and automatically. Teaching children to rely only on context may interfere with this learning. Given that a text is at an appropriate level of difficulty, children should *not* be encouraged to skip words that are difficult for them. When children encounter a word they cannot recognize, they should be encouraged to study the word's spelling, as well as consider its meaning. The information available from context will then be more helpful to them. After they have worked over a new word, they should return to the beginning of the sentence and re-read the whole thing.

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Practice Opportunities

For decoding skills to be useful, readers must eventually be able to decode words automatically, without consciously attending to the process of sounding each word out (60) Teachers know how disruptive it can be to reading comprehension when children read slowly and with many errors. Fluent reading requires practice. Basal reading programs provide practice in a number of different ways—in workbooks and associated worksheets, through flash card drill and computer programs, in writing and spelling activities, and in the selections children are asked to read. What is the best type of practice? The answer from research seems to be that all of these can contribute to automatic word recognition, but that reading meaningful text is the most effective practice activity

Workbooks. As the *Workbooks* booklet notes, there is evidence that practice in workbook tasks can contribute to growth in word recognition, *if the tasks provide a reasonable amount of practice in the skills considered to be important aspects of the program* (50) Well-designed workbook tasks can help in management and provide needed practice

Flash cards Findings from the research on the use of flash card drills to improve word recognition are contradictory. Some studies have found that such drill does not transfer to comprehension (31), while other studies have found positive effects (67)

Computer-assisted practice Computer programs can provide practice in the rapid recognition of words. Some programs have been found to be effective in improving fluency and accuracy of recognizing words (58)

Writing and invented spelling An emphasis on writing activities has been shown repeatedly to produce gains in early reading achievement (4) However, young children's efforts to write and invent spellings hold a special interest to beginning reading instruction because such efforts can reinforce children's knowledge of letter sequences and knowledge of spelling-sound relationships. In addition, invented spelling may improve children's phonemic awareness—especially that of children initially less well prepared for reading instruction (13) Spelling development is quite gradual at this level but as it develops, it can aid the growth of children's word recognition skills as well

Reader selections Most people agree that one of the best sources of practice is the reading of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs (or, as reading researchers describe it, "connected text") Although many types of reading material can supply this practice, the advantage of basal program readers is that they can provide practice in reading connected text that is tied to what is being taught in the program's lessons. Programs must provide ample amounts of connected text that students are capable of reading and that is interesting, engaging, and related to the letter-sound instruction in the program

It is easy to say that selections in basal readers should be interesting and engaging to readers. In practice, however, the creation of such selections using only a limited vocabulary is difficult. In most programs, the stories at the preprimer and primer levels are written to contain words—either sight words or "decodable" words—that the children are learning as part of their formal reading instruction. Early levels of basal readers are written with words chosen because they are useful words that appear frequently in the language, or they are words containing taught letter-sound correspondences. These selections are intended to reinforce the

learning from the lessons and may involve a number of repetitions of words. Some recent research found that selections containing a high percentage of words with taught letter sound correspondences produce readers who have more flexible approaches to word identification and better overall decoding skill (38)

The concern with controlling vocabulary, however, can lead to boring or insubstantial selections. But with creativity, basal reading program developers can construct engaging texts that also reinforce learning from phonics and whole word lessons. Some of the guidelines for evaluating such texts are contained in the *Selections in the Basal Reader* booklet

One form of connected text that appears especially useful at early levels of instruction is the predictable or patterned book. Patterned books contain a predictable pattern repeated throughout the story. This could be a cumulative pattern, such as "The House that Jack Built" or a repeated refrain, such as that in Bill Martin's *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* (45). Such books allow children to use the predictability of the pattern to aid in word recognition. While there has not been a great deal of research on the effects of patterned books, one study found that such books were considerably more effective than traditional preprimers in teaching a set of basic sight words (12)

Patterned books can be used in a number of ways. As "big books" they can be read chorally by a class or a group. Choral and repeated readings have been found to be useful in developing both word recognition and fluency (55). They could also be read individually in much the same way as regular preprimer stories. Patterned books are one way of bridging the transition between the "literate environment" and the more formal instruction required to develop word recognition skills

In addition to patterned books, simple but meaningful stories and short, factual articles can be written with a limited vocabulary so that children will both enjoy reading and re reading them. It is important, though, that the stories be written in a language that is as close to children as possible. Studies have found that children may have difficulty with the artificial "primerese" language that is often created by the repetition of a number of high frequency words in short sentences (61).

Finally, studies show that repeated readings of texts leads not only to gains in fluency but also, over time, to gains in comprehension (35, 60). Beginning reading programs should provide opportunities for children to practice oral reading of the selections chorally, in pairs with a tape recorder, or individually until given criteria of words per minute and accuracy are reached

A FINAL WORD

As the Commission on Reading asserted in *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, the purpose of phonics is to teach children the alphabetic principle so that they can consistently use that principle to help them identify known words and to figure out unknown words on their own. The right maxims for phonics are," the Commission concluded, "Do it early. Keep it simple. Except in cases of diagnosed individual need, phonics instruction should have been completed by the end of second grade."

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To this end, research favors synthetic phonics. However, the "ideal" phonics program would probably contain features from analytic phonics as well. Writing in 1985, the Commission concluded that the phonics approaches recommended in programs fell considerably short of the ideal. Analyses of new editions of basal programs indicate that there are still some problems to be dealt with (26). It is hoped that adoption committees will use the information they gain from using *A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs* to encourage publishers—as the Commission did earlier—to impre e the quality of instructional design, materials, and teaching strategies in their programs.

Footnote

1. Order forms for *Becoming a Nation of Readers The Report of the Commission on Reading*, prepared by R. C. Anderson, E. H. Hiebert, J. A. Scott, and I. A. G. Wilkinson, and *Beginning to Read Thinking and Learning about Print—A Summary*, summarized by S. A. Stahl, J. Osborn, and F Lehr from the Marilyn J. Adams book of the same name, are available from the Center for the Study of Reading. You may obtain order forms by writing the Center at 51 Gerty Drive, Champaign, IL 61820, or by calling (217) 244-4083

PART TWO
Discussion of Guidelines for Evaluating Beginning Reading and Decoding Skill Instruction

As the review of research and practice indicates, there are many things to consider in evaluating beginning reading instruction. The guidelines that follow are not intended to be exhaustive, rather they focus on some key points to look for in examining kindergarten and formal reading instruction in basal reading programs.

KINDERGARTEN INSTRUCTION

Once kindergartens served primarily as a transition between home and school, focusing on developing social skills and conveying general common knowledge. At the same time, it was widely believed that children should not be given systematic reading instruction until they were "ready" to learn to read, which occurred only when they had reached a certain level of maturity. Until children reached this level of maturity, it was held that systematic reading instruction would be unproductive or even harmful (21, 52). Proponents of this view suggested that instead of systematic instruction, kindergarten reading instruction should consist largely of "readiness" activities. As a result, a number of activities—and tests—were developed to promote readiness for reading. Some of these involved teaching children to hop and skip, cut with scissors, match similar shapes, and so on. Many of these activities may be worthwhile, but they have a negligible relationship to reading (57). Learning to read involves experience with the written word. In fact, new understandings of what children are capable of learning, as well as recent studies of the nature of literacy and literacy acquisition have shown that young children have a great deal of knowledge about the form and function of written language. Current practice suggests that reading instruction should build upon this knowledge.

And, in many schools, systematic reading instruction does begins in kindergarten. Positive results have been found both from kindergarten programs that can be characterized as formal, structured, and intensive, as well as programs that are informal, though not haphazard (6, 8, 20, 49). *Becoming a Nation of Readers* recommends "a balanced kindergarten program in reading and language that includes both formal and informal approaches." Such instruction, the Commission continues, should be "systematic but free from undue pressure." It cautions against being "so impatient for our children that we turn kindergartens, and even nursery schools and day care centers, into academic bootcamps." Finally, the Commission urges that

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those children who are least ready for systematic reading instruction are the ones most in need of "ample experience with oral and printed language, and early opportunities to begin to write."

What, then should evaluators look for as they examine kindergarten instruction? The answer to this question depends upon many things, including the school or school district's view of when to begin systematic reading instruction. Because there is some variation in opinion about what the nature of reading instruction in kindergarten classrooms should be, members of adoption committees evaluating beginning reading and decoding skill instruction must discuss and agree upon the type of reading instruction most appropriate for their kindergarten classrooms

GUIDELINE 1. Before examining the specific content of kindergarten reading instruction in basal reading programs, discuss and agree upon the type of reading instruction that is most appropriate for your kindergarten classrooms.

Content of Kindergarten Instruction

The research suggests that if the word awareness, phonemic awareness, knowledge of letter names, and print awareness of all children could be developed in kindergarten—or earlier—the rate of primary school failures would be reduced enormously. The research also suggests that children who do not acquire adequate reading skill by the end of the primary grades are likely to fail in school forever. It seems imperative, therefore, that kindergarten levels of basal programs contain activities that focus on these essential aspects of reading

Word awareness. Although the concept *word* is often developed at home, for many children, school must provide this understanding Early reading instruction usually begins with the assumption that children possess both the concept of *word* and the ability to recognize otherwise familiar words—spoken and written—when examined one at a time. The word *word* is nearly unavoidable in instruction about reading To make any sense out of their classroom activities, therefore, children must already understand—or quickly catch on to—the idea of what a word is.

Fortunately, it is fairly easy to get children to attend to words. In only one setting, young children can make great progress in dividing or segmenting sentences into individual words, although they often have trouble identifying function words and prepositions as separate words (32, 40)

Of course, most children do not learn the concept of *word* this way Most learn about words through exposure to print. Because speakers produce clauses in one continuous breath, in listening to spoken language, children cannot distinguish spaces between the words In looking at print, however, they can see that there are spaces between the words As children become aware of the one-by-one nature of words in print, they begin to notice and isolate words in speech. One researcher showed that word awareness increases dramatically along with the earliest signs of emerging reading ability (28) This nearly, but not quite, obvious nature and function of individual words seems a reason to teach word awareness

Beginning to Read suggests a number of activities to help children understand the concept of *word*. For example, sentence segmentation games, which involve sentences made

from strings of picture cards, can be a good way to train word awareness. By letting children play with the orders and combinations of cards, the activity can be extended to explore the meanings and functions of words as well as their segmentability. Other activities should focus on training children to recognize the purpose of the spaces between words in print. Pointing out words and noting spaces between them in storybooks, on chalkboards, or in big books can reinforce this idea (18).

Exploring and contrasting lengths of printed words can help clarify the difference between syllables and words and hasten the insight that a printed word should be meaningful. Activities dealing with word length can help children become aware of prepositions and short function words (39, 48). Finally, such activities can be a way of showing children that words that take longer to say, look longer in print—reflecting the relationship between speech and alphabetic writing (59).

Phonemic awareness. Partially from learning about letters and words, and partially through rhyming and other word games, children can develop an ability to "play with" the sounds in spoken words and thus develop phonemic awareness. Typically, phonemic awareness activities engage children in a variety of games and activities involving nursery rhymes, rhymed stories and rhyme production, segmentation of sentences into individual words, investigations of word length, clapping and dancing to syllabic rhythms, and the isolation and identification of initial, final, and internal phonemes in words (43).

Although *Beginning to Read* states that the explicit training of phonemic awareness is invaluable for efficient and effective reading instruction, it cautions against giving tests of phonemic awareness to kindergartners, and, if they fail, holding them back from first grade. The key to phonemic awareness lies more in training than in age or maturation. Therefore, if children have not received sufficient exposure to print and sound by age five and a half, there is little to suggest that they will do so "automatically" by the time they are six and a half. As well as explicit training, the activities that seem to lead to the development of phonemic awareness are those involved in learning how to read and spell. To keep children back to "wait" for phonemic awareness to develop is to hold them back from what may be the best opportunities to allow it to develop.

Beginning to Read urges that phonemic awareness games and activities be incorporated into the standard kindergarten and preschool curricula.

Knowledge of letter names. If a number of children in a kindergarten class do not know the names of the letters of the alphabet, does simply teaching them to name and recognize the letters assure that they will become good readers? Research seems to say no. Accurate but slow recognition of letters is not enough, it is the *ease* and the *fluency* with which children can name and identify them that matters.

Children who can quickly recognize most letters will have an easier time learning about letter sounds and word spellings than will children who still have to work at remembering letter identities. A comfortable knowledge of the names and identities of letters hastens the learning of letter sounds because it helps children remember the sounds. That is, if children know that a particular symbol is called *b*, then they can use that fact to help remember its sound.

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Children who recognize letters quickly and accurately will also have an easier time recognizing words as patterns of letters. To the extent that they have to pause and "work" at identifying letters, children will have less attention left for figuring out words. Thus just being able to name the letters is only the first step. What is needed for successful reading is a comfortable familiarity with letters.

Print awareness. Learning about the importance of print often occurs in situations where written language serves to entertain (as in books and magazines), to inform (as in instructions on packages and in games), and to direct (as on traffic signs). The goal is for children to learn about the functions of written language and about what adults mean when they talk about "reading." Programs should include suggestions for activities that make the function of print obvious, useful, and entertaining to children.

Storybook reading. Storybook reading can be used to demonstrate concepts about how print works, including such things as "author," "title," "top," "bottom," which way the print goes, and so forth. The reading aloud of storybooks not only develops children's print awareness, it also initiates children into the wonders of the imaginative worlds accessible only through literature and the wonders of the everyday world accessible through informational books. For kindergarten reading programs, as in the latter grades, storybook reading is not an "extra," but must be an integral part of the school day.

Spelling and writing. Printing letters and writing words are important in their own right. Because of the interrelatedness of the oral and written forms of language, learning to write also aids in reading development. For many young children, the desire to communicate provides an incentive for using written language. Invented spelling is an especially productive way of doing this. Invented spelling forces children to reflect upon the sounds in spoken words and relate them to printed letters in a way that fits in well with young children's natural desire to explore their world.

The arguments for including invented spelling and, later on, spelling instruction as a major component of the reading program are strong. Learning about spelling reinforces children's knowledge about common letter sequences. It also reinforces their knowledge about spelling-sound relationships and may help children become aware of word parts (27). Because of this, spelling practice enhances reading proficiency.

But writing should not take the place of instruction and practice in reading connected text and in word recognition. For children's interest in how words actually are spelled to be useful, they must be exposed to properly written text. For children to learn how words actually are spelled, they must learn to read—and to spell.

GUIDELINE 2. When examining the kindergarten levels of basal reading programs, evaluate the quantity and quality of instruction and practice opportunities for developing

- word awareness
- phonemic awareness
- knowledge of letter names
- print awareness

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Oral Language Activities and Listening Experiences

The development of reading is related to the development of speaking and listening as well as to writing. A quality kindergarten program should provide opportunities for growth in these areas.

In addition to providing a language-rich environment in which children gain knowledge of the world, kindergarten classrooms should encourage children to use language in reflective ways. Providing children with opportunities, such as class discussions, that allow them to listen and respond to adult questions requiring them to reflect upon their experiences can stimulate the kind of mental processes that are needed for them to read with understanding.

Since listening comprehension proficiency also predicts successful reading comprehension, language activities that encourage children to listen to and follow directions as well as those that involve listening to stories should be a part of a school reading program Oral language activities and listening experiences in the classroom are important for all children but especially important for children who have not had experiences at home with the language of schools and books.

Oral language and listening activities should permeate kindergarten classrooms Basal reading programs should contain useful suggestions for these kinds of activities, but in no way should oral language and listening experiences be limited to these suggestions

GUIDELINE 3. When examining kindergarten levels of basal reading programs, evaluate the quantity and quality of instruction and practice opportunities for oral language and listening experiences.

FORMAL READING INSTRUCTION

Although this section focuses on the decoding activities associated with beginning reading, it must once again be emphasized that a balanced beginning reading program contains a variety of writing, spelling, speaking, and listening activities.

The first step in evaluating formal reading instruction in a program is to determine the approach to letter-sound correspondences it uses—analytic or synthetic—and how well it presents that instruction. This can be done by looking at the letter-sound instruction in three consecutive lessons and asking the following questions. 1) Are letter-sound correspondences presented in isolation—a synthetic approach—or are they identified as the sounds heard at the beginning (or middle or end) of a word—an analytic approach? 2) Are letter-sound correspondences presented explicitly, or are children to deduce them from examples? 3) What is the predominant unit of instruction—individual letters and sounds, clusters of letters or spelling patterns, or words? 4) Are the instructional suggestions easy to follow and consistent from lesson to lesson? and 5) Do the lessons review the correspondences presented in previous lessons?

Rather than choosing a program based upon whether it uses a purely analytic or purely synthetic approach to phonics, it seems best to determine that the instruction be clear

and not confusing to students. It is also a good idea to determine that the instruction is adequate. In an analytic program, this can be accomplished by providing some letter-sound correspondences in isolation, but using known words to illustrate how they might actually sound. In a synthetic program, this would involve giving serious attention to teaching children to blend taught sounds into words, and providing a great deal of practice reading words that are composed of the taught sounds.

After determining the approach used in a program, evaluators should consider several other factors, such as the presence of blending exercises, the relationship of the words in the student reader to the taught sounds, and the use of context as an instructional strategy. (Remember that *Beginning to Read* does not recommend an overreliance on context. Rather, it argues that instead of habitually relying on context, children should be encouraged to figure out troubling words from their spellings.)

GUIDELINE 4. Before examining the specific content of formal reading instruction in a basal reading program, determine which approach to phonics instruction it uses and decide if the instruction is clear and adequate.

The Design of Letter-Sound Instruction

If English were perfectly alphabetic—if each letter corresponded exactly to one sound and vice versa—then the number of letter-sound pairs to be learned would equal twenty-six.

However, because the correspondence is not consistently one-to-one but often one-to-several in both directions, there are many more than twenty-six letter-sound pairs to be learned. Exactly how many? It has been found that hundreds of correspondences are involved. In a study restricted to the one- and two-syllable words common to the reading materials of six to nine year olds, the number of relevant letter-sound correspondences was found to be 211 (9).

It is important to recognize, however, that not all of the correspondences are equally useful, not all are required with equal frequency, not all need to be learned in the first grade, and not all that children will learn eventually need be taught explicitly. Therefore, it might be better to ask *which* correspondences should be taught rather than how many. As *Beginning To Read* emphasizes, "Beyond the most basic of basics and despite a long history and broad use, the various presentations of phonics lessons in reading programs contain little in the way of agreement as to the best set of letter-sound pairs to teach explicitly to students."

It seems reasonable, however, to expect that the order in which letter-sound correspondences are introduced be well planned so that they can be combined to form words. Further, it seems reasonable that the design of instructional sequence be evident. Good planning and careful instructional design should result in ease of acquisition of letter-sound correspondences for children.

In examining the design of letter-sound instruction in programs in detail, it might be useful to determine 1) the first fifteen letter-sound correspondences taught and how many words can be made from them 2) the order of introduction of letter-sound correspondences—for both the vowels and the consonants, 3) whether the long and short

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sounds of the same vowel are introduced in the same lesson or whether their introduction is separated; 4) whether different sounds for the same consonant are introduced in the same lesson or their introduction separated (for example, /s/ and /k/ for c); 5) how digraphs, such as /th/ and /sh/, are introduced (whether the concept of two letters together having a different sound is explicitly stated), 6) the provisions that are made for the continuing review of the letter-sound correspondences taught; and 7) the point at which all letter-sound correspondences have been introduced.

In addition to these points, it might be helpful to look at how a program deals with the teaching of rules, or phonic generalizations. Research indicates that although rules can direct children to common spelling patterns and some strategies to use when identifying unknown words, memorization of rules is not productive. Rather, if children are taught rules, they should also be taught to use them flexibly.

Other points to consider can be found in *Beginning to Read*, particularly in the chapter "Issues in the Teaching of Phonics."

GUIDELINE 5. In examining the design of letter-sound instruction in a basal reading program, determine if the order of the introduction of letter-sound correspondences is well planned and if the design of the instruction is evident.

Practice Opportunities

To become successful readers, children need opportunities to practice their decoding skill. In a basal program, this practice can come in the form of workbook pages, flash cards, computer programs, and writing and spelling activities. These practice opportunities should be examined carefully to see if they reflect the instruction presented in the program.

Almost everyone agrees, however, that reading connected text—the selections in student readers and in other books—is the most beneficial practice of all. In examining the selections in basal readers, evaluators should also determine if they reflect instruction in the program. In particular, they should see if the selections contain a good number of words that reinforce the letter-sound correspondences taught in related lessons. Of equal importance, however, is determining that the selections are interesting and engaging to the children who will read them.

GUIDELINE 6. When examining opportunities to practice decoding skill contained in a basal reading program, determine if

- workbook pages, flash cards, computer programs, and writing and spelling activities reflect the program's instruction
- selections contain a good number of words that reinforce letter-sound correspondences taught in related lessons
- selections are interesting and engaging to children

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PART THREE
Teacher Assistance for Beginning Reading and Decoding Skill Instruction

The suggestions that follow are based on research and effective practice. They are intended to help teachers incorporate the information provided in this booklet into their total instructional program.

1 How do I help children's reading development?

- Make reading and writing an integral part of the classroom throughout the day, not just during "reading time." Include print activities in lessons devoted to art, language, music, and mathematics.

- Read to children daily. Reading aloud— both fiction and nonfiction—will develop children's reading in many ways. Such reading will motivate children to explore books on their own, improve their language and world knowledge, and allow their imaginations to thrive.

- Make time for writing, as well as reading. Having children write can be a useful way of improving their knowledge of letter-sound correspondences as well as their understanding of how writers work.

- Allow time for children to read for their own purposes. Even children at the very beginning stages of reading benefit from looking at books and "reading" simple picture books.

2 How should decoding instruction relate to the rest of my reading program?

- Do not teach decoding as an end in itself. The purpose of decoding instruction is to enable children to read fluently and with comprehension.

- Emphasize the links between instruction in decoding and the other parts of the reading program. At least some of the selections children read should contain a lot of words that reinforce the letter-sound correspondences they are learning.

- Keep in mind that the aim of decoding instruction is to get children close enough to a word's pronunciation so they can, with the help of its context, recognize it.

- Children enjoy being fluent readers who easily understand what they read. If necessary, use repeated readings to achieve fluent reading.

- During reading instruction, children should mostly read selections that are at

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their instructional level. Some additional time, however, should be devoted to texts that they can read easily (with a 95% or better oral reading accuracy).

3. How can I help *all* children read?

- Be mindful of the fact that there can be a wide variation in the knowledge that young children have about reading. Some children may not have even the most basic ideas. Provide these children with underlying concepts about the functions of reading and writing as well as with specific information about letters, sounds, and words.

- For children who are already reading simple stories, this kind of instruction probably is not necessary. Instead, emphasize more advanced concepts with them.

- The essential principle of all good teaching—estimate where each student is and build on that base—is doubly important in reading instruction.

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PART FOUR
Listing of Guidelines for Evaluating Beginning Reading and Decoding Skill Instruction

GUIDELINE 1. Before examining the specific content of kindergarten reading instruction in basal reading programs, discuss and agree upon the type of reading instruction that is most appropriate for your kindergarten classrooms

GUIDELINE 2. When examining the kindergarten levels of basal reading programs, evaluate the quantity and quality of instruction and practice opportunities for developing
- word awareness
- phonemic awareness
- knowledge of letter names
- print awareness.

GUIDELINE 3. When examining kindergarten levels of basal reading programs, evaluate the quantity and quality of instruction and practice opportunities for oral language and listening experiences.

GUIDELINE 4. Before examining the specific content of formal reading instruction in a basal reading program, determine which approach to phonics instruction it uses and decide if the instruction is clear and adequate

GUIDELINE 5. In examining the design of letter-sound instruction in a basal reading program, determine if the order of the introduction of letter-sound correspondences is well planned and if the design of the instruction is evident

GUIDELINE 6. When examining opportunities to practice decoding skill contained in a basal reading program, determine if
- workbook pages, flash cards, computer programs, and writing and spelling activities reflect the program's instruction
- selections contain a good number of words that reinforce letter-sound correspondences taught in related lessons
- selections are interesting and engaging to children

PART FIVE
Worksheets for Evaluating Beginning Reading and Decoding Skill Instruction

Some important aspects of beginning reading and decoding skill instruction have been discussed in this booklet and summarized in the guidelines. The worksheets that follow will help you use the information in the booklet as you evaluate beginning reading instruction in reading programs.

Specific directions precede each worksheet. Additional information about the worksheets can be found in the *Leader's Manual*.

Materials and Resources Needed

You will need one worksheet for every reading program you plan to evaluate. Reproduce as many worksheets as you need. For each program you evaluate, you will also need copies of

- Teachers' manuals
- Student textbooks

Points to Keep in Mind

1   You may find that you do not need to complete every column or answer every question on a worksheet. Empty spaces do not mean that a program has deficiencies.

2   You may choose to use only parts of each worksheet.

Rating What You Have Evaluated

You may wish to develop a rating scale to quantify your overall evaluation of beginning reading instruction in the programs you examine. We have provided space on each worksheet for you to record these ratings.

WORKSHEET 1: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINE 1: Kindergarten Instruction

> In the space provided, state your agreed-upon goals for reading instruction in the kindergarten program.

GUIDELINES 2, 3: Quantity and Quality of Kindergarten Instruction

1. Look at five consecutive lessons each from the beginning, middle, and end c the program. Then list by name and page number the activities in the lessons that develop each of the following:
   a. word awareness,
   b. phonemic awareness
   c. letter name knowledge
   d. print awareness.

   Using information from the Research and Practice section of the booklet, evaluate the appropriateness and quality of these activities

2. Repeat this procedure for oral language and listening activities

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BEGINNING READING AND DECODING SKILL

Publisher _____ . Program _____ Grade Level _____ Copyright _____ Evaluator _____

GUIDELINE 1
KINDERGARTEN INSTRUCTION

Statement of the committee's goals for kindergarten reading instruction.

GUIDELINES 2, 3 QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION	Lesson 1 Name pp	Lesson 2 Name pp	Lesson 3 Name pp	Lesson 4 Name pp	Lesson 5 Name pp	Rating
Word awareness						
Phonemic awareness						
Letter name knowledge						
Print awareness						
Oral language						
Listening						

WORKSHEET 2: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINE 4: Formal Reading Instruction

Look at the letter-sound instruction in three consecutive lessons. Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

a. Are letter-sound correspondences presented in isolation (synthetic) or are they identified as the sounds heard at the beginning, middle, or end of a word (analytic)?

b Are letter-sound correspondences presented explicitly or are children expected to deduce them from examples?

c. What is the predominant unit of instruction (letters and sounds, clusters of sounds and spelling patterns, or words)?

d. Are instructional suggestions easy to follow and consistent from lesson to lesson?

e. Do the lessons review the correspondences taught in previous lessons?

On the basis of your answers to these questions, decide if the program uses an analytic or a synthetic approach to phonics instruction and whether its instruction is clear and adequate Record your answers.

GUIDELINE 5: Design of Letter-Sound Instruction

Look at the letter-sound instruction in three consecutive lessons Comment, using the following questions to guide your evaluation.

a What are the first fifteen letter-sound correspondences taught? How many words can be made from them?

b. What is the order of introduction of letter-sound correspondences (vowels and consonants)?

c Are the long and short sounds of the same vowel introduced in the same lesson, or is their introduction separated?

d. Are different sounds for the same consonant introduced in the same lesson, or is their introduction separated?

e. How are digraphs introduced?

f. What provisions are made for continuing the review of the letter-sound correspondences taught?

g At what point have all of the letter-sound correspondences been introduced?

h. How does the program deal with teaching rules or phonic generalizations?

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Based on your comments, decide if the design of the letter-sound instruction in the program is well-planned and if the design of the instruction is evident. Record your answers.

GUIDELINE 6: Practice Opportunities

1   Examine the various opportunities for decoding skill practice provided in the program's workbook pages, flash cards, computer programs, and writing and spelling activities. Comment on whether they reflect the program's instruction.

2   Look at at least five selections in the basal reader (both fiction and nonfiction) and comment on whether they reflect and reinforce the letter-sound correspondences taught in related lessons Then decide if children will find the selections interesting and engaging.

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Publisher _____ Program _____ Grade Level _____ Copyright _____ Evaluator _____

GUIDELINE 4 FORMAL READING INSTRUCTION		Rating:
Names and inclusive page numbers of lessons examined·		
a. _____ c ___ d. b _____ e ___	Approach to phonics instruction used in program Comments on the clarity and adequacy of instruction	

GUIDELINE 5 DESIGN OF LETTER-SOUND INSTRUCTION	
Names and inclusive page numbers of lessons examined	
Comments	

GUIDELINE 6
PRACTICE OPPORTUNITIES

a Workbook pages

b Flash cards

c Computer programs

d Writing/spelling activities

Selection 1 Name· PP	Selection 2 Name PP	Selection 3 Name PP	Selection 4 Name PP	Selection 5 Name PP

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PART SIX
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COMPREHENSION I:
The Directed Reading Lesson

**A Guide to Selecting
Basal Reading Programs**

CONTENTS

PART ONE
Research and Practice

Students' success in school depends largely upon how well they can get meaning from the books and other materials they read. Therefore, comprehension instruction is an important part of the teaching of reading, and it is a primary goal of most basal reading programs

Comprehension instruction in reading programs usually is built around the selections contained in the basal reader, or student textbook, and is composed of a series of teacher-guided activities commonly known as the directed reading lesson. Classroom observation research has shown that as they take students through a reading selection, teachers are strongly influenced by the procedures, instructions, and recommendations suggested in teachers' manuals (3, 4, 5).

Because the directed reading lesson and the instructional suggestions that accompany it can play such an important role in the teaching of comprehension, this booklet focuses on that aspect of basal reading programs A companion booklet, *Comprehension II Skills and Strategies*, concentrates on instruction designed to provide students with more general skills and strategies that can help them to read all kinds of materials on their own

The Nature of Reading Comprehension

One view of reading holds that reading is a simple process of figuring out or decoding the words on a printed page The belief underlying this view is that the pronunciation of words gives access to the meanings, and that comprehension comes automatically Current research, however, has established that while this view of reading is partly correct, reading is a much more complex process. In *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, its report on the state of reading research and instruction, the Commission on Reading defined reading as

[T]he process of constructing meaning from written texts It is a complex skill requiring the coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information (1)

To gain some understanding of what happens when we read, it is helpful to examine several points raised by the definition What is meant by the term *written texts*? What does it mean to *construct meaning*? How do readers *construct meaning* from written texts? What are *interrelated sources of information*? and How do readers *coordinate* interrelated sources of information?

• What is meant by the term written texts? A written text is anything we read It can be any number of things a page in a book, an article in a newspaper, a letter from a friend, a

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computer printout, a billboard on the side of a highway, or the directions on the back of a box of cake mix

  • **What does it mean to construct meaning?** Reading is a process in which a reader's own knowledge is combined with the information in a book or other written texts to create meaning. When we successfully combine what we are reading with our own knowledge, we are engaged in the *construction of meaning*.

  • **How do readers construct meaning from written text?** The construction of meaning is a dynamic process. As we read words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs of a text, we continuously revise our interpretations of what that text means (8). This ability to interpret a text's meaning is the result of our keeping track of, comparing, and integrating what the author has written with what we already know—that is, with our own *background knowledge* about the subject matter in the text, other relevant information, and the conventions of how texts are written.

  This process of constructing meaning can be imagined as a continuous dialogue between us and the author of the text we are reading. The dialogue proceeds as we read through the text, and as it continues, we "write" a new text in our own heads. This new text "in our heads" is the result of integrating our ideas with those of the author in a way that makes sense to us (and, if the author had the opportunity to examine the text in our heads, it would also make sense to him or her). By creating this new text, we have constructed meaning from the text we were reading (2).

  • **What are interrelated sources of information?** In the view of reading we mentioned earlier, reading is a process that "starts at the bottom," with readers first identifying letters, then learning the meaning of words through pronunciation, then adding the meanings of words together to produce the meaning of clauses and sentences, then combing the meanings of sentences to produce the meanings of paragraphs and entire texts.

  Research shows, however, that in addition to producing meanings from letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs, readers also select and use their knowledge about people, places and things, and their knowledge about texts and how they are organized. All of these things are the interrelated sources of information.

  • **How do readers coordinate interrelated sources of information?** Comprehension depends upon the ability of readers to organize the different kinds of knowledge they possess. The ability to coordinate these sources of information requires experience and practice. When readers understand what they are reading, they have mastered the complexities of coordinating many interrelated sources of information.

The Directed Reading Lesson

The objective of the directed reading lesson is to build students' comprehension competence through meaningful encounters with written texts (5). Typically, the lesson proceeds through several stages, beginning with a *prereading*, or preparation stage during which the teacher introduces the selection, provides background information, and presents new vocabulary that will be encountered in the selection. As part of this stage, the teacher might also set the purpose for reading the selection and pose questions for the students to answer as they read. During the second stage, the students *read* the selection, orally or silently, in its entirety or in

sections. They may also answer questions as they read or after they have read. In the concluding stage of the lesson, students complete *follow-up* activities, including discussion, rereading, and workbook practice with the skills and strategies used in the lesson.

The directed reading lesson has been a central feature of reading programs for many years, and, in many cases, the instructional suggestions provided with them have simply evolved without any evidence to support their effectiveness. In fact, researchers have discovered that, in some programs, the instructional suggestions were misleading or irrelevant to the selections they accompanied (4). This is one reason why you should carefully examine the instructional practices provided in basal programs for the directed reading lesson.

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PART TWO
Discussion of Guidelines for Evaluating the Directed Reading Lesson

This part of the booklet presents four guidelines to help you as you examine instructional practices for the directed reading lesson. The guidelines relate specifically to prereading activities, questions to accompany and follow reading, and follow-up activities.

The examples used in this discussion relate to the story, *Up to the Loft*, which appears below. While this selection is a narrative, and is similar to narratives found in basal reading programs, the guidelines presented in relation to it can be applied as well to articles, biographies, poems, and other kinds of selections that appear in reading programs. We suggest that you read the story before proceeding to the discussion of guidelines.

Up to the Loft

Whenever Mary Beth thought about the harvest, she felt even sicker than she already was. She had really looked forward to the harvest this year. For the first time, Ma and Pa had said that she could work with the rest of the family in the fields. No longer would she have to walk over to the Stevens' house during harvest and spend the day playing with little Johnny. No longer would she have to listen to her brothers tease her about being the baby of the family.

Mary Beth coughed and took another drink of water. In her mind she could still hear her mother's words from that morning.

"Now, Mary Beth, you have a cold. You'll have to stay in bed today."

"But, Ma ——"

"There's no buts about it, young lady. It's too late to take you over to the Stevens' house, but I think you'll be all right by yourself. Just stay in bed and keep warm."

"But, Ma ——"

"Now hush. We'll be back by sundown. If you take good care of yourself, you might be well enough to work with us tomorrow."

So Mary Beth took care of herself. First she read her book, then she sewed a pillowcase, then she played with her dolls. And then she got bored. Bored and angry. Why did her mother have to make her stay home? She was tired of being treated like a baby. Sure she felt sick, but she could have done

something to help with the harvest.

Mary Beth looked out her window. In the distance she could see Ma and Pa and her brothers harvesting corn. Closer by she could see the big barn where Betsy lived. Betsy was a gray mare who was now too old to work. She spent most of her time in the barn munching hay.

Suddenly Mary Beth had an idea. As long as nobody was around, she could play in the loft! Mary Beth had never been in the loft because Pa wouldn't let her climb the ladder that led to it. He said it was too dangerous.

"Too dangerous!" thought Mary Beth. "That's because he still thinks I'm a baby."

Five minutes later, Mary Beth opened the door to the barn. She was wrapped in a blanket and feeling better by the minute. A doll's head peeked out of each of the large pockets of her nightgown. "At least I'll have some fun today," she thought, "And no one will ever know."

She went over to Betsy and patted her. Betsy just kept munching hay, but she did flick her tail back and forth a few times. Right next to Betsy was the ladder that led up to the loft. It was tall and rickety, and it did look a bit dangerous, but Mary Beth was determined to see the loft. She looked around to make sure no one was watching, and then she put her foot on the first rung.

The ladder creaked under Mary Beth's weight. She hesitated for a moment and then began the long, slow climb. Every once in a while, the ladder would quiver slightly and make groaning noises, but Mary Beth just kept her eyes on the loft and tried not to be scared.

When she was about halfway up the ladder, Mary Beth heard a sudden noise from below. Her dog Judy had come through the open barn door and was dancing around Betsy's heels. The old mare kicked at the dog with her powerful hind legs. Her first kick missed Judy, and so did the second. The third kick, however, landed squarely on the ladder. Mary Beth swayed for an instant and then fell to the ground with a thud. The ladder crashed down right next to her. Judy, terrified by the noise, streaked out of the barn like a furry comet. And then everything went black for Mary Beth.

Some time later, Mary Beth opened her eyes and cried out from the pain. She tried to get up, but her legs wouldn't support her. She looked around the empty barn and saw that Betsy was gone. "I wonder where she is?" Mary Beth thought. But the pain in her legs soon made her think of her own problem. "How can I get help?" she said. "Ma and the others won't be back until sundown."

Mary Beth began to feel desperate. She looked around the barn again. Her eyes stopped when they reached the big bell hanging from the door. Ma used the bell once a day to call the family in for dinner. If only she could ring the bell, Ma and the others would come running.

Mary Beth began crawling toward the bell but stopped short when she realized that she could not possibly reach the rope to ring it. The rope was far

out of reach. There was no other way to ring the bell, unless....

She crawled frantically back to the ladder. One side of the ladder had broken off and was now just a long piece of wood. It was heavy, but Mary Beth managed to drag it to the doorway. Then she grabbed the wood in both hands and slowly stood it on end. It just barely reached the bell.

Using all her strength, Mary Beth swung the wood back and forth. The bell clanged loudly. Again and again she swung the wood, even though her arms were aching. The bell clanged again and again. Finally, weak from pain and exhausted from her efforts, Mary Beth let the wood drop to the ground. She sat perfectly still for a minute and then passed out.

Days later, Ma helped Mary beth get up on her crutches

"Ma?" asked Mary Beth, "Tell me, why didn't you punish me for what I did? You made me stay in my room for two days when I let the pigs out of their pen. And this is lots worse than that!"

"Well, Mary Beth, I thought about it a lot," Ma replied. "And what I decided was that the broken leg, the cast, and the crutches were punishment enough. Besides, I'm proud of the way you found to give us a distress signal. We knew that something was wrong when Betsy came wandering out into the field, but we didn't realize how important it was until we heard the bell ringing."

"I'm sorry, Ma," Mary Beth said "I know I shouldn't have climbed that ladder"

"Well, maybe you've learned a couple of lessons from this. It could be all for the best."

Mary Beth didn't say anything. Ma is right, I guess, she thought. I probably *have* learned a thing or two. I should have closed the door to keep that silly dog out!

Prereading Activities

Teachers' manuals accompanying most reading programs contain suggestions for ways to prepare students to read a selection. This section will discuss two types of prereading activities typically found in the manuals activities for building background knowledge and for setting purposes. Additional prereading activities, such as vocabulary instruction, comprehension skill and strategy development, and decoding, are discussed in other booklets in this series

Building background knowledge. The first type of prereading activity typically found in a directed reading lesson is the activity intended to build background knowledge Background-building activities differ markedly. Some activities suggest asking students about their own experiences with the topic of a selection, others suggest telling students what a selection will be about, and still others suggest giving students information about the type of selection they will be reading Classroom observers have discovered that teachers sometimes modify these different kinds of activities to fit their own purposes, or even skip them entirely In fact, teachers in one study claimed they did not have time to devote to background-building activities (9).

Recent research, however, indicates that background knowledge plays a critical role in reading comprehension. One researcher summarized the importance of these investigations as follows: "The strongest conclusion to emerge from research on reading in the last decade is that understanding something new often hinges on relating it to something old (13)." Therefore, an appropriate amount of time spent on building background knowledge is time well spent (2, 11).

Teaching unknown concepts central to understanding an upcoming selection is important, especially if the selection is different from others students have read or if students have little knowledge about the topic. For example, an understanding of the characteristics of a *loft* is crucial to our example story. Students need to know that a loft is located in a barn, that one must climb a ladder to get to a loft, and that a loft can be a nice place in which to play. Students who do not have knowledge of these aspects of the word *loft* are not likely to understand the story unless the teacher discusses the word with them before they read the story.

Instructional time spent for building background knowledge must be used appropriately. Not all instruction is good instruction. For example, instructional time should not be spent on trivial concepts that are not important to the understanding of a selection. Consider the activities in the following examples:

Example 1(a)

Ask students, "What do you like to do when you play?" Then elicit from students that sometimes it is fun to play with others and sometimes it is fun to play by yourself. *Say,* "Name some things you like to do when you play by yourself." Make a list of things students enjoy doing by themselves. *Ask students,* "Would you like to do different things if you lived in the city or in the country?" Make two lists.

Nice Things to Do in the City   Nice Things to Do in the Country

Then tell students that *Up to the Loft* is a story about a girl who plays by herself in the country.

Example 1(b)

If you think students know what a loft is, ask them to discuss any experiences they have had with lofts. If students do not know what a loft is, tell them. Discuss the important features of lofts—that hay is stored in lofts, that lofts are usually reached by ladders, that lofts can be fun places in which to play.

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The activities in both examples relate students' background experiences to the information in the story. But in Example 1(a) students' attention is focused on an unimportant part of the story—Mary Beth's play In Example 1(b), on the other hand, students' attention is focused on a concept central to an understanding of the story.

Common sense dictates that teachers should not spend large amounts of valuable instructional time teaching background knowledge that students already possess Some readers, however, may possess relevant background knowledge but fail to use this knowledge when they read (6). Research has established that young and less-able readers sometimes need to be reminded that they can use what they already know to help them better understand a selection (6). In such cases, teachers need to point out the connections between what students already know and what they are about to read

Developers of basal reading programs face a dilemma as they plan the background-building activities of teachers' manuals They know that some students may have limited knowledge about the topic of a selection, whereas other students may be very familiar with it Hence, it is unrealistic for teachers to expect that manuals always will provide lessons perfectly appropriate for their students What teachers *can* expect, however, is that developers will give some indication in the manuals of what information is important to an upcoming selection, and that the activities they include in the manuals do not divert attention to irrelevant information

GUIDELINE 1. When examining the background-building activities of a directed reading lesson, look for instruction that
- reminds students of what they already know about a topic
- ties new information to students' own knowledge
- focuses on the important ideas and concepts in an upcoming selection or on generally useful knowledge
- avoids irrelevant information

Setting purposes. The second type of prereading activity typically found in a directed reading lesson is the purpose-setting activity A purpose-setting activity is intended to help students realize that they are not to read a selection aimlessly but with a goal in mind

Purpose-setting activities should provide a framework that will enable readers to organize the events and concepts in a selection One group of researchers claims that such a framework will help readers integrate the different parts of a selection, thus making it more memorable (4). They identified three kinds of purpose-setting activities
1 "Effective" activities, which are likely to have a positive effect on the comprehension of a selection by developing vocabulary, increasing factual recall, improving strategic reading abilities, or directing attention to important aspects of the selection
2. "Indifferent" activities, which have little effect on the comprehension of a selection
3 "Misdirective" activities, which are likely to have a generally negative effect on the comprehension of a selection by focusing student attention on trivial aspects of the selection or on inappropriate background experiences, thus leading them to a disjointed understanding of the selection
With these categories in mind, consider the activities contained in the following examples

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Example 2(a)

> Say: "Now read this story about Mary Beth to find out how she gets out of a difficult
> situation and what she learns from it."

Example 2(b)

> Say: "Now read this story about Mary Beth to find out how she broke her leg."

Example 2(c)

> Say: "Now read this story about Mary Beth to find out what toys Mary Beth decided to
> take with her up to the loft."

The activity in Example 2(a) is an effective purpose-setting activity. It directs students
to the main character's problem and to her solution to the problem. It also leads students
toward a complete understanding of the story. On the other hand, the activity in Example 2(b)
seems an indifferent purpose-setting activity. That Mary Beth broke her leg is not as important
as how she got her parents' attention. Students reading for this purpose would not be directed
to the most important part of the story. The activity in Example 2(c) is a misdirective purpose-
setting activity. It misdirects students' attention by focusing on an unimportant aspect of the
story. If students were to read for the purpose set in this activity, they likely would retain
information about Mary Beth's dolls, but not about her basic problem and its solution.

GUIDELINE 2. When examining the purpose-setting activities of a directed reading lesson,
determine if they are effective activities that will help students understand the reason they are
reading a selection.

Comprehension Questions

Teachers' manuals to accompany directed reading lessons generally contain questions for
teachers to ask as students read a selection or when they have finished reading it. These
questions are intended to help students understand the selection and to help teachers discover
how well they understand it. Because young students cannot always remember an entire
selection, manuals for primary-grade reading programs usually provide questions for use after
students have read a paragraph or a page. Manuals for use with intermediate-grade programs,
however, usually provide questions for use after students have read several pages or an entire
selection. Regardless of where the questions are placed in a manual, when teachers use "artful
questioning" day after day and week after week, students eventually will internalize what it
means to understand a story. It is not surprising, therefore, that questions are a regular feature
of most reading comprehension instruction found in basal reading programs.

When teachers use questions artfully, they provide students with the opportunity to
organize and integrate information. Some readers especially young or less-able readers, may
not easily put together the main points in a selection; such readers often do not see
relationships between important events, concepts, or ideas. Questioning can help these readers
make important connections and see relationships they otherwise might miss. In the following
example, students first read the paragraph, then answer several questions.

Example 3

  All of a sudden Susan remembered that the next day was Melissa's birthday.
Susan got out of her chair and ran to the kitchen. She got out the flour, sugar,
butter, eggs, and chocolate and began to make a chocolate cake

  Teacher's questions
  What did Susan remember about the next day?
  Why did Susan run into the kitchen?
  Why is she making a cake?

  Questions such as these can help direct students to discover the relationships between
Susan's ideas and her actions

  Good questions also can help most readers see the relationship between what they are
reading and what they already know Several studies have shown that when students are
exposed to well-designed comprehension questions, they demonstrate improved
comprehension both for the selection they have just read and for additional selections they read
on their own (16)

  Teachers frequently express concern about the questions provided in teachers' manuals
and about questions they make up on their own They are concerned, for example, about what
kinds of questions are the best to ask, about whether they should ask more inferential or literal
questions, about how many detail questions to ask, and about whether interpretive questions
are important

  Teacher educators are also concerned about questions Many who teach reading
methods courses frequently include instruction about different kinds of questions and have
their students develop and label questions according to a comprehension taxonomy such as (L)
for literal, (I) for interpretive, and (A) for applied Research in reading comprehension,
however, suggests that the importance of questions as an instructional technique lies not so
much in their level on a comprehension taxonomy as in their ability to help students develop
what some researchers call a "unified conception" of a selection (14).

  One way to help students develop a unified conception of a selection is by using a set
of interrelated questions designed to lead them through a selection There is research evidence,
in fact, that questions focusing attention on the important points of a story result in better
comprehension and recall of the story (5, 15, 16), and that after many experiences with these
kinds of questions, students d   onstrate a better recall of stories they read (16).

  Some researchers have used a procedure called a *story grammar* to create sets of
questions that can help students identify and organize the main points in a selection (4, 5, 12)
A story grammar describes the regular features of a particular kind of writing, such as the parts
of a well-formed story

  Drawing from story grammar and from other research on story structure, other
researchers have developed *story maps* as a way to highlight the central content of a story (5) A
story map is a representation of the general structure of children's stories, that is, it illustrates
what most children's stories have in common. A story map emphasizes the key elements of a
story, including the setting (time, place, major characters), the problem (most stories represent

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characters' attempts to solve problems), the main character's goals (usually to alleviate the problem), the set of attempts to achieve the goal (the major events in the story), and the resolution (usually achieving the goal and alleviating the problem).

After teachers generate a story map for a selection, they develop sets, or lines of questions designed to elicit the map's major components. These questions stress only those details that are essential to the flow of the story—setting, problems, attempts to solve problems, goals, characters' reactions, resolutions and themes, or morals (4) Using a story map apparently helps students develop their own frameworks for understanding stories Such a framework may also improve comprehension and recall of what is read.

Example 4(a)

During or after reading, the teacher asks the following questions

1 Where did the story take place?
2 Who is the main person in the story?
3 What did Mary Beth want to do?
4. What happened when Mary Beth climbed the ladder?
5 What was Mary Beth's problem?
6 What did Mary Beth do to solve her problem?
7 What happened when the bell rang?
8 Why didn't Ma punish Mary Beth?

For each question, students indicate which sentence or paragraph in the selection helped them with their answers Students are encouraged to reread the parts of the story that answer the questions

Example 4(b)

During or after reading, the teacher asks the following questions.

1 Why did Mary Beth look forward to harvest time this year?
2 Why had Mary Beth gone to the Stevens' house in the past years?
3 Why did Mary Beth stay home?
4 How did Mary Beth feel about staying home?
5 What did the dog do when Mary Beth fell?
6 Why was Mary Beth on crutches?
7 What did Ma use the bell for?
8 Why was Ma proud of Mary Beth?

Both sets of questions in these examples lead students more or less sequentially through the selection Yet there are major differences between the two The questions in Example 4(a) follow a story map and form a line of questions designed to help students see how the setting, problem, key events, and story outcome are intertwined After students have correctly answered these questions, they will have a basic understanding of the story On the other hand, the questions in Example 4(b) do not form an interrelated line of questions

Instead, these questions focus on unrelated events and ideas and do not lead students through the main points in the selection

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the kinds of questions students are asked influence where they focus their attention and what they comprehend (15, 16) For example, if students are asked about the main points of a selection, they will probably attend to the main points If they are asked about irrelevant and trivial details, they will probably attend to those details

It must be noted, however, that not all questions about the details of a selection are trivial. Understanding some of its details can be important to the understanding of a selection For example, "What did Mary Beth want to do?" is a detail question that is both important to the story and appropriate to the set of questions in Example 4(a)

Although research supports the effectiveness of sets of questions, it does not indicate whether they are appropriate for all reading selections for daily use with all students Other types of questions are important too Questions can lead students to extend the ideas in a selection. For example, a question can encourage students to imagine how a character would react in another situation or can prompt students to relate how they would react in similar circumstances

A question also can serve as a springboard for discussion about the author's craft For example, questions that ask students to evaluate an author's ability to create believable characters or suspense, how the author created the setting or mood of the story, or how the author foreshadowed the major event use basic story events to extend understanding beyond the story itself.

In addition, some questions can motivate higher level thinking by encouraging bot! high- and low-ability students to think in ways that will help them understand information in a reading selection (7) Example 5 illustrates one way teachers can stimulate higher level thinking by asking students to predict what will happen in a selection based on information they already have

Example 5

Read the first paragraph of this story Then based on the information you read, the title of the story, and what we have discussed about lofts, think about what might happen in this story Be ready to tell what makes you think so

In this example, students predict what is going to happen in the story, read parts of the story silently, and then predict what will happen next They can also gather information from the selection to defend their predictions In fact, recent research shows that asking students to give evidence for, or justify their answers to prediction questions using information from the selection and from their background knowledge is a useful way to get students to think about what they are reading and to integrate information from it with their own knowledge (10)

Research also demonstrates clearly that students can learn to become self-questioners and better monitors of their own reading In one set of research studies readers learned to ask questions about the most important points in the expository selections they read (7, 15) They also successfully learned how to summarize and to clarify

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Finally, the need for teachers to be responsive when they are asking questions seems evident. Conventional wisdom suggests that teachers should listen to what students say in answering questions and respond to their answers rather than take them automatically through a set of questions.

GUIDELINE 3 When examining the questions provided in a directed reading lesson, look for questions that
- focus on important parts of a selection
- help students organize and integrate the ideas in a selection
- help students see the relationship between what they read and what they already know
- help students develop self-questioning and monitoring skills

Follow-up Activities

Follow-up activities should be evaluated according to how well they serve several functions. First, they should give students an opportunity to connect what they have learned in the prereading stage with what they have discovered in their reading. For example, they should allow students to integrate what they have learned from a selection with their own background knowledge or give them the chance to use new vocabulary words. Second, they should provide students with opportunities to apply both newly acquired and previously learned skills and strategies such as locating main ideas and supporting details. Third, they should provide students with opportunities to integrate reading with other language arts and with other subject areas. For example, follow-up discussions of the issues, morals, or topics in a selection can give students practice both in speaking and listening. Writing and acting out scenes based on the selection can give them practice in writing as well as in speaking and listening. Enrichment activities can tie topics covered in the reading selection to music or art activities, or provide opportunities to use subject area knowledge about historical events or people. Fourth, when appropriate, follow-up activities should allow students to reflect on a lesson about life. For example, follow-up discussions about the issues or morals raised in a selection can help students see how the text relates to their own experiences.

The following examples illustrate some follow-up activities that meet these criteria.

Example 6(a)

Say. Reread the story. As you read, think about your own mother. Think about how she would react
- if she had to leave you behind because you were sick
- when she heard the bell
- when she saw you lying on the floor of the barn
- when you were on crutches

What would your mother have done to punish you?

Example 6(b)

Say: Several cause and effect events occurred in the story *Up to the Loft* On one side of the chalkboard I have written *Cause* and on the other side I have written *Effect* Let's think about some of the events in the story and write these events .. der the correct headings I'll give you the first one The *Effect* was that Mary Beth fell off the ladder What was the *Cause*?

Example 6(c)

Say There are many books about young girls who lived on the frontier One of these is *Little House on the Prairie*, another is a diary called *A Gathering of Days* I want you to read one of these books and then we'll write about the experiences of the main characters If you like, you can act out a scene from one of the books

[ple 6(d)

Say In *Up to the Loft*, Mary Beth admits that she "learned a thing or two" from her experience Let's talk about the things she learned, then see if we can come up with some experiences of our own that have taught us valuable lessons

Example 6(a) offers students an opportunity to reread the story from another perspective and to relate their own experiences to the story Example 6(b) gives students an opportunity to analyze the story for cause and effect relationships, and thus practice an important study skill Example 6(c) encourages students to do additional reading about frontier life, which allows them to use information from social studies and history lessons and to integrate the language arts of reading, writing, speaking, and listening Finally Example 6(d) allows students to draw a lesson about life from their reading

GUIDELINE 4 When examining follow-up activities provided with a directed reading lesson look for activities that

- help students connect what they have discovered in reading a selection with what they learned in prereading activities
- help students apply both newly acquired and previously learned skills and strategies to the selection
- require students to integrate reading, language arts and other subject areas

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PART THREE
Teacher Assistance for the Directed Reading Lesson

The suggestions that follow are based on research and effective practice. They are intended to help teachers incorporate the information provided in this booklet into their total instructional program

1   How can I make the directed reading lesson more effective and more interesting?

- Keep group size for directed reading lessons sufficiently small to allow all students to actively participate in the discussions.

- Avoid establishing a routinized approach to using directed reading lessons   These lessons are designed to provide ideas for your consideration as you conduct comprehension instruction   The complexities of comprehension cannot be solved by the automatic implementation of a lockstep plan

- Base decisions to implement components of the directed reading lesson on your knowledge of your students' needs, abilities, and interests

- Provide assistance and structure at the beginning of the year in guiding students to set reading purposes. As the year progresses, encourage students to set their own purposes for reading.

2   How can I help students during prereading?

- Focus on concepts that are central to the understanding of a selection. Stress those concepts that your students either do not have or may not think of without some help

- Coordinate themes in subject area lessons with those in basal readers whenever possible to build background knowledge.

- Vary the form in which you have students make predictions. Having students discuss predictions in a group, write predictions individually, compare group and individual predictions, generate several predictions for one event in a selection, or vote on the most probable outcome are just a few ways of accomplishing this

3. How can I help students while they are reading?

- Allow students of all abilities opportunities to read orally. Oral reading can not only provide you with a means to observe reading progress, diagnose problems, and focus instruction, it can also give students a means of sharing their emerging abilities with parents and friends. *However, permit students to read a selection silently before you ask them to read orally.*

- Use repeated reading of a selection as a way of improving fluency. This can be done by having small groups of students read along with an adult or by having students practice reading a selection silently before they read it aloud to you.

4. How can I help students after reading?

- Use the selection students have just read as an illustration of some aspect of reading comprehension, and provide direct instruction in that specific aspect.

- Ask questions that will help students see relationships between what they have read and what they already know.

- Ask questions that focus on the major elements of the selection, not on unimportant details.

5. How can I encourage more independent reading?

- Use a selection as a jumping off point for expanding reading interests. Recommend other books and stories on the same subject or by the same author.

- Use the setting or plot element in a fictional selection to suggest additional nonfiction reading ideas, such as learning more about a historical event or a foreign country. Also use nonfiction selections for fiction reading ideas.

- Look for local authors and invite them to come read their works to your students.

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PART FOUR
Listing of Guidelines for Evaluating the Directed Reading Lesson

GUIDELINE 1. When examining the background knowledge building activities of a directed reading lesson, look for instruction that

- reminds students of what they already know about a topic
- ties new information to students' own knowledge
- focuses on the important ideas and concepts in an upcoming selection or on generally useful knowledge
- avoids irrelevant information

GUIDELINE 2 When examining the purpose-setting activities of a directed reading lesson, determine if they are effective activities that will help students understand the reason they are reading a selection

GUIDELINE 3. When examining the questions provided in a directed reading lesson, look for questions that

- focus on important parts of the selection
- help students organize and integrate the ideas in a selection
- help students see the relationship between what they read and what they already know
- help students develop self-questioning and monitoring skills

GUIDELINE 4. When examining follow-up activities provided with a directed reading lesson, look for activities that

- help students connect what they have discovered in reading a selection with what they learned in prereading activities
- help students apply both newly acquired and previously learned skills and strategies to the selection
- require students to integrate reading, language arts, and other subject areas
- when appropriate, allow students to reflect on a lesson about life

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PART FIVE
Worksheets for Evaluating the Directed Reading Lesson

Some important aspects of comprehension instruction have been discussed in this booklet and summarized in the guidelines. The following two worksheets will help you use the guidelines to evaluate comprehension instruction in directed reading lessons.

Specific directions for using the worksheets precede each one. General directions and some additional information about worksheets appear in the *Leader's Manual*

Materials and Resources Needed

You will need one copy of each worksheet for every lesson you plan to evaluate. For example, if you plan to evaluate three lessons at one grade level, you will need three copies of each worksheet. If you plan to evaluate two grade levels, you will need six copies of each worksheet. For each level of each program you plan to evaluate, you will *also* need

- Teachers' manuals
- Student textbooks
- Workbooks and skillsheets

Points to Keep in Mind

1   The worksheets are most suitable for evaluating comprehension instruction in basal reading programs for grades two through eight

2.   Do not assume that you will always fill every column and box of the worksheets Some parts may not apply to each level of the programs you are evaluating Empty spaces do not necessarily mean a program is deficient

3   You may choose to use only one worksheet or only certain parts of each of the worksheets

Rating What You Have Evaluated

You may wish to develop a rating scale to quantify your overall evaluation of comprehension instruction in the basal reading programs you examine We have included space on the worksheets for you to record these ratings

WORKSHEET 1: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINE 3: Questions

1. Choose a selection from one level of the student textbook (do not use the version in the teacher's manual). Read the selection carefully

2. After reading the selection, make a rough outline of the important points in the selection. Record your outline in the appropriate column. For a story, important points can include setting, problem, plot, resolution, and moral or themes. For expository selections, important points can address the questions: "What ideas do I want students to get when they read this?" and "If I had to support each of these ideas, what more specific information would I use?"

3. Now construct questions for each point. You should try to develop a set of questions (or a story map) that interrelates important points from the selection. Record your questions under the appropriate heading

    Check your list. If you have too many questions (from six to ten is a good range), eliminate what you think are the less important ones

4. Look in the teacher's manual and find the questions to be asked during and after the reading of the selection. Compare these questions with the questions you have developed, and evaluate the questions according to Guideline 3. (You should not expect a perfect match between your questions and the teacher's manual questions. However, when your questions and the manual questions differ widely and do so for a number of selections, then you may want to question the quality of the questions used in the manual.) You may wish to record all questions that are irrelevant, misleading, or too picky under the corresponding heading

5. Now look at the directed reading lesson questions in the teacher's manual from a different perspective. Examine the set as a whole and ask, "If I asked this whole set of questions, would my students develop an integrated understanding of the selection the way I outlined it?" Record your evaluation and comments under the Overall Evaluation heading

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Publisher_____   Grade Level _____   Program _____   Copyright _____   Evaluator _____

GUIDELINE 3 QUESTIONS	Selection Title:			
Outline of the Important Points in the Selection	Set of Questions (or Story Map).	Comments on Teacher's Manual Questions	Overall Evaluation	Rating
	1			
	2			
	3			
	4			
	5			
	6			
	7			
	8			
	9			
	10			

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WORKSHEET 2: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINES 1, 2, 4: Prereading and Follow-up Activities

1.   Use the same lesson that you used for Worksheet 1. Find the prereading and follow-up activities in the teacher's manual of that lesson.

2.   Evaluate these activities according to the criteria set in Guidelines 1, 2, and 4 Record your evaluation comments in the appropriate column. Also evaluate other comprehension activities that you may find in different sections of the lesson You may find some good and poor activities that we have not mentioned in this booklet.

Publisher_____   Grade Level _____   Program _____   Copyright _____   Evaluator _____

GUIDELINES 1, 2, 4 PREREADING AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES	Selection Title·	
Directed Reading Lesson Activities	Comments.	Rating
Building background knowledge		
Purpose-setting		
Follow-up		
Other activities		

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PART SIX
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COMPREHENSION II:
Skills and Strategies

**A Guide to Selecting
Basal Reading Programs**

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CONTENTS

PART ONE
Research and Practice

Reading is the process of constructing meaning from written materials. Providing students with instruction that will help them get meaning from the stories, books, magazines, newspapers, and other texts they read is a continuing concern of teachers.

A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs contains two booklets devoted to comprehension instruction. Comprehension I: The Directed Reading Lesson focuses on instruction designed to help students better understand the selections they read in their basal readers. This booklet, Comprehension II: Skills and Strategies, concentrates on instruction designed to provide students with general comprehension skills and strategies that can help them understand what they read when they read on their own.

The purpose of this booklet is to combine research findings with knowledge gained from practice to provide you with information you can use as you examine some of the comprehension instruction in basal reading programs.

THE COMPREHENSION CURRICULUM

Research has consistently demonstrated that students focus on what their teachers present to them. This is true of instruction in general and of comprehension instruction in particular (21). It makes sense, therefore, to be selective and thoughtful in deciding what should comprise the comprehension curriculum. A brief review of how the comprehension curriculum of American schools has evolved might be helpful in this decision-making process.

The Traditional Curriculum

Prior to the 1940s, comprehension instruction in basal reading programs was based on the belief that practice makes perfect and consisted primarily of teachers asking students questions about the selections they read in their basal readers. However, program developers began to realize that having teachers ask questions at the end of a reading selection was not always enough to produce comprehension competence in all students. This realization led to the addition of expanded comprehension instruction strands to many basal programs. In addition to the questions provided in the teachers' manuals, program developers created activities, or tasks (often unrelated to the selections in the student textbooks), and placed them in workbooks. These activities broke down comprehension into skills, such as finding main ideas, determining sequence, identifying cause and effect relationships, drawing conclusions, and predicting outcomes (22). Thus, the skills-based curriculum was born.

Driven by a growing body of reading research attempting to determine the "essential" components, or skills, of reading, the skills-based curriculum grew to dominate reading instruction in the 1940s and 1950s (6, 22). In many basal reading programs of this period, comprehension was taught as a set of specific skills, such as those needed to use an expanded vocabulary; to locate information; to select, evaluate, and organize materials; to retain information; and to develop comprehension fluency. In a given basal program, each of these skills might be broken down further into component subskills. For example, under locating information, one program listed nine subskills, including the following: using the dictionary, using tables of content, reading maps, skimming, taking notes, and outlining (22).

The skills emphasis in basal programs was accompanied by an interest in the continuity of comprehension instruction. Instruction to achieve skill development was planned not only within grade levels but across grade levels through what came to be called the spiral curriculum. These instructional plans, which were summarized on scope and sequence charts, emerged as the central organizing focus of reading programs.

Beginning in the 1950s and continuing into the early 1980s, program developers expanded and refined the list of skills deemed important to reading comprehension (7). In spite of their efforts, developers, as one writer noted, were "unable to clarify sufficiently the nature, independence or difficulty level of comprehension abilities in reading" (23). At any time in this period, therefore, the curriculum for teaching comprehension skills in basal programs reflected the current best guesses, rather than research-based findings, about what is important to teach in reading.

That developers of basal reading programs had little convincing research-based information upon which to build their comprehension instruction perhaps explains why the small number of skills stressed in reading programs in the 1940s expanded to the large number of skills and workbook activities included in programs in the 1970s and 1980s. The belief seemed to be that more must be better.

The Changing Comprehension Curriculum

The value of the skills-based curriculum began to be questioned in the 1970s. One important study involved observations of comprehension instruction in grades three through six (12). Information from this study indicated that teachers were, in fact, not instructing students in comprehension skills but merely "mentioning" those skills—that is, briefly alluding to a particular skill students were supposed to apply, "practicing," or having students complete workbook exercises featuring the skill; and "assessing," or testing students to see if they used the skill properly. It was suggested that such a curriculum did not help students to learn directly *what* the comprehension skills were, *how* they should go about applying them, or *why* or *when* they should use them.

During this same period, a number of cognitive psychologists and linguists were studying different aspects of the process of comprehension. The research of these groups has converged with that of reading instruction researchers to provide us with a view of reading variously called an interactive, a schema-theoretic, a constructive, a cognitive, or a strategic model of reading. This view focuses on reading not as the application of a set of skills but as a process of constructing meaning.

According to an interactive view of reading (1), when we read a book, we are not passively applying a set of discrete skills. Rather, we are actively constructing meaning by connecting our existing knowledge to the knowledge we encounter in the book. Furthermore, while we read, we constantly evaluate what we are reading by comparing it to relevant knowledge we already possess. We accommodate new information by confirming it against this knowledge or by revising what we know. As we do this, we gradually construct the meaning of what we are reading.

The interactive view of reading suggests that comprehension instruction must be a much more complex process of teacher, text, and student interactions than is suggested by the traditional skills instruction in which the teacher's role is essentially one of focusing student attention on the skills to be worked on that day. In the interactive view, the teacher's role is to help students construct an understanding of what they read by sharing with them information about how comprehension works and by helping them relate what they read to what they already know.

The interactive view of reading has increased our understanding of the comprehension process, and many of the ideas it has produced are evident in comprehension curricula that are beginning to appear in some basal programs. Among the most important of these ideas are

- a focus on developing comprehension strategies rather than isolated reading skills,
- the use of explicit, or direct, instruction, and
- instruction intended to develop metacognitive awareness.

We will look at each of these ideas in the following discussion.

Skills and strategies. In the traditional reading curriculum, comprehension is most typically taught as a set of isolated skills appearing in activities that students engage in with small pieces of text, frequently on workbook pages. For example, finding the main idea of a paragraph is sometimes taught through the repeated practice of reading short paragraphs and choosing from four possible main idea statements.

More and more, however, comprehension is being taught as the development and use of reading strategies. Strategies differ from skills in that skills are often conceived of as automatic procedures that do not require thought, interpretation, or choice, while strategies are often seen as conscious plans under the control of the reader, who must make decisions about which strategies to use and when to use them (10).

Skills instruction differs from strategy instruction in several ways. For example, skills instruction stresses repeated practice in applying skills until they become habitual responses to particular tasks. Strategy instruction stresses the reasoning processes that readers go through as they interact with and comprehend text. In addition, strategy instruction emphasizes the adaptable nature of the comprehension process, how the strategies readers use change when they read different kinds of text or when they read for different purposes (10).

The following examples illustrate the differences between a more traditional skills-based instructional approach and an approach stressing strategy use and development.

Example 1

(Finding the Main Idea)

Objective: Identify the main idea and details of a picture.

Call attention to the picture of people in a restaurant. Have the students study the picture. Use the following questions to aid discussion:

- What is happening here?
- Who might the people be?
- Why did they decide to eat in the restaurant?
- Where did they get all the food?

This is the entire activity on finding the main idea and details of a picture. The second activity in the same teacher's manual proceeds as follows:

Objective: Identify the main idea and details of a poem.

Have pupils listen as you read the Mother Goose rhyme, "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary." Elicit the main idea of the poem by asking students what it is about (Mary who did not want to do as she was told).

These two activities are examples of activities that merely "mention" rather than teach comprehension. There seems to be nothing in the instruction in these lessons that would help students understand *what* they are supposed to do with the skill, *how* and *when* to use it, or *why* it is important. In all probability, students who already understand the concept of main idea will answer the questions correctly. On the other hand, students who have no concept of main idea are not likely to develop one through the instruction presented in the teacher's manual.

Compare the activities in Example 1 to the much more extensive activity in Example 2. Note how the activity in Example 2 stresses strategies rather than skills to help students identify main ideas.

Example 2

Objective. Identifying main ideas and supporting details.

Say: I am going to read you a passage about people's last names Then I will ask you to decide what the main idea of the passage is.

Read: A lot of our last names come from the jobs people did a long time ago. For example, the name Wright once meant someone who made or repaired things. The name Sawyer meant someone who cut wood into planks and boards. Taylors made clothes.

Say: Now, I want you to decide which sentence sums up the topic of the passage. (*After students identify the first sentence, tell them that this sentence states the main idea of the passage.*) I'll read the passage again, and I want you to listen and then tell me how the other sentences are different from the first. (*Reread the passage.*)

Say: Can you tell me how the other sentences in the passage differ from the first one? (*After students discover that the sentences each supply some information about the topic of the first sentence, explain these sentences contain supporting details.*)

Say: We are going to learn to recognize main ideas and supporting details. Being able to recognize main ideas and supporting details helps you to understand a passage and to determine its most important ideas. One way to recognize a main idea is to ask yourself what the topic of the passage is, then look for a sentence that sums up what the passage says about the topic. After you find the sentence with the main idea, look at the rest of the sentences in the passage to see which ones supply supporting detail. You can do this with any kind of selection you are reading. (*Model the strategy by reading a passage aloud and telling students how you go about finding its main idea and supporting details.*)

Say: Now I want you to explain to me how to find a main id and supporting details. Then I want you to read a passage to me and tell me how you discover its main idea and supporting details. (*Review the strategy used and then have students read other passages and find main ideas and supporting details on their own.*)

Notice that in Example 2, the teacher explains what the students are going to learn (how to find main ideas and supporting details when they read) and why they need to learn it (it will help them to understand the selections read and to determine what is important in each one). Then the teacher leads the students through the activity, modeling and explaining what she is doing as she proceeds, and suggesting that the strategy being learned is one that can be applied to different kinds of reading selections. She reinforces the use of the strategy by allowing students to apply it to their own reading.

Strategy instruction, then, focuses on ways to help students understand what they read. Some of the traditional comprehension skills, such as cause and effect relationships and drawing inferences, can be conceived of and taught as strategies if they are taught in this manner.

It has been proposed that most of what are frequently defined as skills, even word recognition skills, should be taught as strategies (8). For example, the use of phonics is only one of several ways in which words are identified, and a strategic repertoire of word identification procedures includes the use of structural and contextual cues as well as phonics. Studies show that when teachers explain carefully how to use skills, students begin to see reading as a strategic process and to use skills strategically rather than automatically (9, 11, 14, 17).

This is not to say, however, that there should be no *skills* in reading programs. The development of automatic responses with some of the most common conventions of written

language, such as recognition of letters, high utility words, and punctuation marks, is essential if readers are to read fluently. And, for some students, a certain amount of such skill instruction is necessary to the achievement of automatic responses (15).

What research findings suggest is that successful comprehension instruction includes a mixture of activities to develop automatic word identification skills and activities to develop strategies that can be consciously applied during reading.

Explicit/direct instruction. Explicit, or direct, instruction differs from traditional instruction in at least three ways. First, in explicit instruction, teachers do not merely *mention* what a particular strategy is, they *model* its use in a clear, step-by-step fashion. The examples they use to illustrate the strategy are carefully selected to give students a full picture of what the strategy is and how and when to use it. Teachers begin instruction with relatively simple applications, and as students show their understanding of what is being modeled, they provide increasingly complex examples and applications.

Second, in explicit instruction, students do not simply *practice* using the strategy, teachers provide them with *guided practice* that allows them gradually to release responsibility for completing an activity to students. During guided practice, the teacher checks how well students are doing and provides immediate feedback when they make mistakes, perhaps by reminding them of the steps of the strategy or by sharing some relevant information so that students can proceed on their own. Providing adequate feedback and guided practice is a key principle in explicit instruction. Students are not asked to work independently until they have shown that they understand the strategy and how and when to use it.

Third, teachers using explicit instruction do not merely *assess* whether students can use a strategy, they ask students to *apply* their strategies to new and varied reading selections (18).

Therefore, rather than only providing students with repeated practice, teachers first share with students information they can use to construct understandings about how reading "works" and *then* provide them with practice.

Looking across a range of research traditions, including the direct instruction research of the early to middle 1970s, the teacher effectiveness research of the late 1970s, and the explicit instruction research of the middle 1980s, a consistent set of patterns emerges when direct, explicit approaches to skill and strategy instruction are compared to forms of instruction that rely primarily on exposure and repeated practice. Since 1979, for example, at least 60 studies have compared explicit approaches to teaching comprehension with the more traditional approaches. These studies have shown that while explicit instruction is effective in teaching students of all ages and ability levels, it is especially effective with young students and poor readers (4, 13, 19, 20, 21).

Metacognitive awareness. Helping students to become aware of how they comprehend is a major part of the changing comprehension curriculum. Cognition can refer to the various functions of the mind, such as remembering, focusing attention, and processing information. Metacognition refers to our awareness of our cognition—it is thinking about thinking. When the term metacognitive awareness is applied to reading, it means that readers are aware of what they do when they read, what to do when they encounter difficulties, and how to select strategies to accomplish their purposes for reading (2, 3, 5). For example, readers who can describe the steps they go through in focusing on the main idea of a selection can be

thought of as "aware" readers, whereas a reader who simply says, "I just do it," is probably unaware of his reasoning process (10).

It must be pointed out, however, that many expert readers do not consciously exercise their metacognitive awareness as they read. For example, when they are reading something familiar or easy, good readers seem to have no conscious awareness of the strategies they are applying (2, 3). Their ability to construct meaning is so rapid they seem to proceed on "automatic pilot"—until some triggering event alerts them to a comprehension failure (5).

It is generally when they encounter unfamiliar text or text that is more difficult than usual that expert readers seem to use strategic behaviors. It has been suggested that when they read unfamiliar and difficult text, expert readers use strategies throughout the reading process (2, 3, 5). Before reading, for example, they think about what they already know about the topic of a selection, the type of selection it is, the author's purpose for writing the selection, or their own purposes for reading it.

In addition, during and after reading, they employ repair strategies. These "fix-up" strategies are used by readers whenever they have problems determining the meaning of what they are reading. The need to apply a repair strategy can be signalled by an encounter with an unknown word, by a prediction that is incorrect, or by something in the passage that does not ring true. For example, when a reader has problems understanding a passage because of an unknown word, she applies strategies to figure out what a word means (2). These strategies can include using context, knowledge of sound-symbol relationships, or the structure of the passage.

While resea h has given us a clear, well-documented picture of what expert readers do when they read—that is, what strategic behaviors they exhibit—it unfortunately has not provided us with a clear explanation of how they got to be such good readers. For example, while metacognitive awareness instruction has been shown to be effective with low- and middle-ability students, its effectiveness with students who are successful readers has not been demonstrated. The conjecture is that such students have already developed their own effective strategies for constructing meaning, and that new ideas for comprehending text do not add to their success (18).

Concerns about Comprehension Skills and Strategy Instruction

As you make decisions about which reading programs provide the best opportunities for improving students' comprehension, you need to be aware that while current reading research implies a great deal about comprehension, it has left a number of key instructional issues unresolved.

Despite years of study, for example, researchers have produced little evidence to support the existence of the traditional comprehension skills and the value of teaching such skills; and, as already has been discussed, reading strategies are only beginning to be investigated. Furthermore, research has not substantiated the validity of any particular scope and sequence of comprehension skills or strategies. Neither has it provided guidance as to which skills and strategies should be taught at which grade levels or information about how instruction in a given skill or strategy should change across grades if it is taught at more than one level.

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In addition, the evaluation process is complicated by the fact that different publishers use different terminology to label specific skills and strategies. For example, what one publisher calls inferencing, another may call drawing conclusions. Matching these labels to the cognitive requirements of the activities placed under them can be difficult. Conversely, different publishers use different activities for the same label. For example, drawing inferences may be called a skill in one part of the program and a strategy in another. Additionally, the same skill or strategy may be given different names in different parts of the program. Main idea instruction in three different first-grade activities might require students to do three entirely different things.

Research, then, can only partially provide an answer to the question of what critical comprehension skills and strategies ought to be in a basal reading program. Therefore, in evaluating a program's comprehension activities, you must combine the results of research with what you know from your own classroom experiences and those of your colleagues, then adapt this information to meet the needs of the students in your schools.

PART TWO
Discussion of Guidelines for Evaluating Comprehension Skills and Strategies Instruction

As the review of research and practice shows, ideas about how to teach comprehension have changed dramatically over the years. The guidelines presented in this section are intended to help you determine the extent to which the programs you are evaluating provide instruction that reflects recent developments emerging from research about reading comprehension, as well as from the practical wisdom derived from your own teaching expertise.

A Curriculum Overview

As we noted earlier, research has not substantiated the validity of any particular scope and sequence of comprehension instruction. Furthermore, no basal reading program can, or should, create a plan for teaching reading skills and strategies in which everything is taught simultaneously. Obviously some skills and strategies will be taught before others, but the order in which they are taught matters in only some cases. For example, strategies such as determining importance, summarizing, using prior knowledge, drawing inferences, and self-monitoring, can be taught at nearly every age or level (10). What matters is that the presentation of skills and strategies reflects a logical progression in development, both within and across grade levels. Programs and teachers simply have to start somewhere and move toward something.

GUIDELINE 1. As you evaluate the comprehension instruction of a reading program, determine if it presents a logical progression in the cumulative development . its skills and strategies, both within and across grade levels

In the traditional curriculum, the development of reading expertise is viewed as a mastery process in which each of the various reading skills or strategies is presented in a hierarchy. Students practice using a skill or strategy until they master it and then move on to another. Mastery of a list of skills and strategies is equated with reading comprehension. In the changing curriculum, however, the development of reading expertise is viewed as a process of growth rather than mastery. That is, what changes in comprehension instruction from level to level is not the skill or strategy itself, but the difficulty of the content to which the skill or strategy is applied and the facility with which readers are able to apply it.

10.

Comprehension instruction, then, should provide students opportunities to apply useful skills and strategies to a variety of reading texts that become progressively more difficult from level to level.

GUIDELINE 2. As you evaluate the comprehension instruction of a reading program, determine if it reflects the application of skills and strategies to increasingly difficult content and to a variety of text types.

Comprehension instruction should also allow students opportunities to review and practice the skills and strategies they are taught. This means not only that they should use the skill or strategy to complete workbook activities but also as they read the selections in their student textbooks and complete writing assignments. For example, as they read, students should be encouraged to look for examples of cause and effect statements, fact and opinion statements, or paragraphs that have no main ideas. Ideally, students will also learn to apply the skills and strategies they are taught as they read own their own.

GUIDELINE 3. As you evaluate the comprehension instruction of a reading program, determine if it provides review and practice opportunities in workbook activities, in the selections in student textbooks, in writing suggestions and assignments, and in extended reading opportunities.

Criteria for Comprehension Instruction

Most basal programs provide instructional activities for many skills and strategies. In some programs, in fact, the terms skills and strategies are used interchangeably and perhaps inconsistently. But regardless of how the comprehension activities in the programs you examine are labeled, a good number of them should promote the development of three key factors. These factors, which are drawn from a body of research describing what expert readers do when they read, are *determining what is important, synthesizing information,* and *drawing inferences* (10). The following discussion will look at each factor.

Determining what is important Determining what is important in the text is crucial to comprehension. The instructional terminology for determining importance differs from one program to another, but the most commonly used term is *finding the main idea.* Whatever it is labeled, the purpose of such instruction should be to help readers sort out what is central to a given paragraph, section, or chapter. Finding the main idea is merely one way of doing this.

How does a reader differentiate what is important from what is unimportant? Researchers have established that expert readers often use three different procedures as they read a selection. First, they use their general background knowledge and their knowledge about a specific topic to help them figure out what is going on in a selection. Second, they use their knowledge of text structure to help them identify and organize the information in a selection. This includes paying attention to key words, phrases, graphics, summarizing statements, and other textual cues. Third, expert readers use their knowledge of author biases, intentions, and goals to help them determine what is important.

The comprehension curriculum should include activities that teach students ways to determine what is important information in the text. This means more than simply finding the main idea of a paragraph, it means showing students how to use their own knowledge about the world and about the topic of a selection to help them figure out what is important. It also means showing them how to use text structure and knowledge about the author's purpose to determine importance.

Synthesizing information. A logical extension of determining importance is the ability to synthesize information across larger units of text to create summaries. Students must learn to distinguish main ideas from details, and they must learn how to integrate those ideas into coherent summaries that, presumably, will help them keep in mind both important and supporting information about what they are reading.

The comprehension curriculum should include activities that help students learn some rudimentary operations for creating summaries. These operations might include learning how to delete irrelevant or redundant material, how to locate topic sentences for paragraphs and use them in preparing summaries, and how to create topic sentences for paragraphs that do not have them.

Drawing inferences. Drawing inferences is an essential part of comprehension (1) Students draw inferences in at least two ways when they read. The first way is by deducing relations among ideas in a text. For example, they combine clues from a story to determine the motive behind a character's actions. The second way they draw inferences is by using their background knowledge to deduce what the text does not explicitly state.

The comprehension curriculum should include activities that help students use both their background information and information they get from a text to help them draw inferences while they read.

Despite the conventional wisdom that seems to argue for delaying inference drawing activities until students have mastered literal comprehension, research clearly supports a strong emphasis on instruction in drawing inferences even at the earliest grades (10)

GUIDELINE 4. As you examine the comprehension activities in reading programs - regardless of how they are labeled—determine whether they contribute to the development of the three important factors of
- determining what is important
- synthesizing information
- drawing inferences.

Explicit Comprehension Instruction

Research has provided us with ample evidence that comprehension can be taught. The current view of instruction suggests the use of explicit, or direct, instructional approaches, in which teachers model and explain what strategies are, help students learn how and when to use the strategies, and give them opportunities to apply the strategies (18) The following discussion will look closer at each of these steps.

Modeling and explanation. In this step, teachers first explain to students *what* the strategy is, then they show students *how* to apply it to a given reading selection. Often this

involves teachers thinking aloud as they are reading to demonstrate to students the way they use strategies while they read.

Guided practice. In this step, teachers work with students to help them figure out *how* and *when* to apply the strategy they are learning. Teachers may discuss with their students what they find difficult or confusing in a selection. They can also ask students to think aloud as they read, and offer them encouragement and feedback as they do so, especially when students are stumped or unresponsive.

As students become proficient in using a strategy, teachers can provide them with independent practice. For those students who have difficulty working on their own, teachers can supply more feedback about correct and incorrect responses and discuss with the students their reasons for choosing the responses.

Application. Application is often omitted from instruction. In this step, teachers ask students to apply a strategy, and students move to reading activities in which they can apply the strategy they have been learning. This is the step at which students move toward assuming responsibility for determining what strategy to use and how, when, and why to use it.

A word of caution: reading programs may not label these steps in the same way, and they may not present them in same order. They may not even present them as discrete steps. Nonetheless, each of the ideas in the steps we have discussed should appear somewhere within a cycle for teaching a given strategy.

GUIDELINE 5. As you examine comprehension instructional approaches in reading programs, look for *explicit* instruction that includes aspects of modeling and explanation, guided practice, and application.

Developing Metacognitive Awareness

Teachers have always known that good readers are more careful in their reading than are poor readers and that they are more aware of how well they are understanding what they read. Good readers are also better able to alter their reading strategies to compensate for a problem once they realize one exists. For example, they can recognize when portions of a text are not making sense and can see inconsistencies. Poor readers, by contrast, tend to be much less aware of problems and are less able to compensate even when they are aware that something is wrong.

Considerable evidence reveals that even very young children can be taught, through explicit instruction, to be aware of when something makes sense and when it does not (16). By including training in how to monitor comprehension in reading instruction, teachers can help students learn strategies to use in clarifying text that is otherwise difficult for them to understand.

Rather than only answering comprehension questions or completing worksheets, students who are not able to monitor their comprehension need to be taught how to become aware of *how* they answer questions and *how* they use different strategies to get the information needed to complete the worksheets.

Awareness is a key to being in control of comprehension—students cannot fix comprehension problems unless they are aware of how to use repair strategies. In addition,

students cannot apply strategies to new reading situations unless they are aware of when and how to use the strategies. Consequently, comprehension instruction should build student awareness of what they already know so that they can call on that knowledge whenever they encounter similar situations.

GUIDELINE 6. As you examine the comprehension instruction in reading programs, look for activities that develop students' metacognitive awareness.

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PART THREE
Teacher Assistance for Comprehension Skills and Strategies Instruction

The suggestions that follow are based on research and effective practice. They are intended to help teachers incorporate the information provided in this booklet into their total instructional program.

1   How can I help students develop comprehension strategies?

- Share your predictions, understandings, and misunderstandings of selections in the same way you ask the students to share theirs. This will demonstrate how you, as a competent reader, are also actively engaged in the comprehension process.

- Provide practice in choosing the most appropriate strategy for a specific type of text and for a specific purpose.

- Also provide practice by having students apply a specific strategy to several different kinds of reading selections, both fiction and nonfiction.

- Encourage students to "talk" themselves through their first independent attempts at applying a specific strategy. These efforts can assist them in focusing on the steps of the strategy as well as raising their awareness of what they are doing to construct meaning.

- Use peer tutoring or cooperative learning to give students practice in strategy application.

- Have students monitor their comprehension by asking themselves questions before reading, during reading, and after reading. Some suggestions for questions are:

    (Prereading)
    What is this about? What do I already know about this? Why do I need to read this? What do I think will happen?

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(During reading)
Does everything make sense? Did I correctly predict what would happen?
Can I summarize what has taken place?

(After reading)
What was it about? What did I learn from it? Did it tell me something that
didn't agree with what I already know?

- Provide direct instruction in strategies that help students to focus their attention on
  the important information in a selection, to synthesize that information, and to
  integrate it with information they already have.

2. How can I allocate more classroom time to develop students' comprehension strategies
   through independent reading?

   - Use independent reading as an alternative to some workbook tasks.

   - Use independent reading during transition times.

   - Set aside a time during the day when everybody in the class—including
     you—reads.

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PART FOUR
Listing of Guidelines for Evaluating Comprehension Skills and Strategies Instruction

GUIDELINE 1. As you evaluate the comprehension instruction of a reading program, determine if it presents a logical progression in the cumulative development of specific skills and strategies, both within and across grade levels.

GUIDELINE 2. As you evaluate the comprehension instruction of a reading program, determine if it reflects the application of skills and strategies to increasingly difficult content and to a variety of selection types.

GUIDELINE 3. As you evaluate the comprehension instruction of a reading program, determine if it provides review and practice opportunities in workbook activities, in the selections in student textbooks, in writing suggestions and assignments, and in extended reading opportunities.

GUIDELINE 4. As you examine the comprehension activities in reading programs—regardless of how they are labeled—determine whether they contribute to the development of the three important factors of
- determining what is important
- synthesizing information
- drawing inferences.

GUIDELINE 5. As you examine comprehension instructional approaches in reading programs, look for *explicit* instruction that includes aspects of modeling and explanation, guided practice, and application.

GUIDELINE 6. As you examine the comprehension instruction in reading programs, look for activities that develop students' metacognitive awareness.

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PART FIVE
Worksheets for Evaluating Comprehension Skills and Strategies Instruction

The job of evaluating comprehension skills and strategies instruction is not a simple one. However, the two worksheets that follow will help you examine those dimensions of reading lessons you believe to be important to your own comprehension instruction.

Specific directions for using the worksheets precede each one. General directions and some additional information about worksheets appear in the *Leader's Manual*.

Materials and Resources Needed

You will need one copy of each worksheet for every reading program you plan to evaluate. Reproduce as many copies as you need. For each level of comprehension instruction you plan to evaluate, you will also need:

- Teachers' manuals
- Student textbooks.

Points to Keep in Mind

1   The worksheets are appropriate for all grade levels. However, you will find great variety in the way skills and strategies are laid out as you cross from primary to intermediate grades.

2   As you analyze the various comprehension activities of a program, you may find several skills or strategies that have not been discussed in this booklet. First, remember that this may be because different programs use different labels for the same skill or strategy. Then, discuss the importance of the skills or strategies included in the program.

3.   Do not expect to fill in every column on each worksheet. Some parts may not apply to the specific program or task you are evaluating. Empty spaces do not necessarily mean a program is inadequate.

4.   You may choose to use only parts of each worksheet.

Rating What You Have Evaluated

You may wish to develop a rating scale of your own to quantify your overall evaluation of comprehension skills and strategies instruction in the programs you examine. We have included space on the worksheets for you to record your ratings.

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WORKSHEET 1: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINES 1, 2, 3: Comprehension Instruction Overview

1. These are general overview guidelines for the reading programs you are evaluating. To answer the questions on the worksheet, page through the table of contents of the teacher's manual to locate skills and strategies activities. Record them on the worksheet.

2. Do not assume that the skills and strategies listed in the table of contents are the only ones to be taught in the program. You may also discover others that are included in each level of the program under different names. You should note these on the worksheet.

3. After listing the skills and strategies you have found, discuss whether the programs meet the criteria set forth in the guidelines and record your conclusions on the worksheet

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Publisher_____ Program _____ Grade Level _____ Copyright _____ Evaluator _____

GUIDELINES 1, 2, 3
COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION
OVERVIEW

List the comprehension skills and strategies
introduced and practiced in this basal.

	Level ____ Comments:	Level ____ Comments:	Rating:

1. Indicate whether and how the instruction presents
 	
  a. a clear progression in the cumulative development of the skill/strategy
 	
  b. a clear progression in the development of the skill/strategy within a grade level
 	
  c. a clear progression in the development of the skill/strategy across grade levels.
 	
2. Locate and record evidence that the skill/strategy is applied to increasingly difficult content and to a variety of selection types.
 	
3. Analyze the adequacy of review and practice opportunities
 	
  a. in workbook activities
 	
  b. in the selections in student textbooks
 	
  c. in extended reading opportunities
 	
  d. in writing suggestions and assignments.			

WORKSHEET 2: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINE 4: Presentation and Development of Key Skills and Strategies

1. This section of the worksheet provides you with the opportunity to evaluate the activities that develop comprehension skills and strategies in reading programs.

2. Examine activities in *at least* two different levels of the program to determine if they contribute to the development of the three key comprehension factors discussed in the guideline.

GUIDELINES 5, 6: Instructional Approaches

1. Choose one skill or strategy, such as synthesizing information.

2. Pick activities at two different levels of the program that can be categorized under this label (remember, programs can use different labels for the same topic).

3. Observe how each activity presents the skill or strategy, and determine how well it illustrates the use of modeling and explanation, guided practice, and application.

4. Determine if the activity helps students develop their awareness of what they know so that they can use this knowledge as they read.

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Publisher_____ Program _____ Grade Level _____ Copyright _____ Evaluator _____

GUIDELINE 4 PRESENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF KEY SKILLS/STRATEGIES	Level ____ Comments:	Level ____ Comments:	Rating:

Analyze whether and how the comprehension activity contributes to the development of students' abilities to
 	
  a determine what is important in a selection
 	
  b. synthesize information
 	
  c. draw inferences.			

GUIDELINES 5, 6 INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES	Comments:	Comments:	Rating:

1. Skill or Strategy Evaluated. _____
   Discuss whether the activity provides direct explanation of
 	
  a. what skill/strategy is being taught
 	
  b. how to use the skill/strategy
 	
  c. when to use the skill/strategy
 	
  d. why the skill/strategy should be used
 	
2. Discuss whether the activity provides for explicit, or direct instruction, such as
 	
  a, teacher modeling and explanation
 	
  b. guided practice
 	
  c. application.
 	
3 Record ways the activity contributes to the development of students' metacognitive awareness.			

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PART SIX
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READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION

**A Guide to Selecting
Basal Reading Programs**

CONTENTS

PART ONE
Research and Practice

In recent years, teachers and researchers increasingly have been interested in the relationship between reading and writing. Rather than solely viewing reading and writing as separate processes for separate times of a school day, they have started considering the relationship of these forms of written language. Recent editions of basal reading programs acknowledge a relationship between reading and writing, and reflect concerted efforts to incorporate writing activities. These activities are presented at various places within a basal lesson and are designated through various labels, such as "language arts connections," "reading-writing connections," and "writing to learn."

The purpose of this booklet is to provide information that can guide your examination of writing activities found within basal reading programs. The booklet presents information about the relationship between reading and writing as well as a rationale for connecting the two in a reading program.

How Reading and Writing are Related

There is general agreement among teachers and researchers that both reading and writing are complex processes. The acquisition of reading fluency, for instance, involves the development and application of many kinds of knowledge. Fluent readers are able, among other things, to use knowledge of letter-sound correspondences to decode words efficiently, to use knowledge of word meanings to comprehend sentences, and to use their existing knowledge of a topic to aid acquisition of new knowledge. Writing, too, involves the use of different kinds of knowledge as writers plan, compose, reread, and revise their work.

Reading and writing as composing processes. Some researchers see both reading and writing as composing processes (22, 27, 31). They argue that just as writers compose meaning as they write, readers compose meaning as they read. According to their view, good readers go through many of the same processes of constructing meaning as do good writers. These processes may be categorized as *planning* (prereading or prewriting), *drafting* (discovering meaning), and *revising* (postreading or modifying and extending).

Planning. Planning for both writers and readers involves setting purposes or goals. For writers, this can mean deciding who the audience will be for the writing and what the audience's reaction might be (4). Or, it can mean determining what the focus of the writing should be and how it should be organized (10, 1.). For readers, setting purposes can mean predicting what the writing will be about and what point the author will make (11).

Planning also involves the use of background knowledge. Writers call upon relevant information from their own experiences to help them generate ideas and to organize their

writing; readers use their background knowledge of a topic to tie new information with that they already possess to interpret the author's intentions (11). Research shows that readers with more background knowledge are likely to read with greater comprehension, and writers with more background knowledge are likely to write with more coherence (1).

Drafting. As they draft, or compose, writers modify the information they gathered in planning to better suit their purposes and audiences (8). They may change the organization of their writing, its language, or its focus. As they read, readers also modify their knowledge of how written language is organized and used, as well as other knowledge they possess, to make things "fit" (2, 22). Often they realize that they must read "between the lines" to discover what the author intended.

Revising. In revising, writers and readers check to see how well they have constructed their message (22). Writers fine tune their writing by adding more information or removing information that is not important or may be misleading. They also check to see that the final work meets their initial goal or purpose for the writing. Readers may reread passages to make sure they understand them or to discover discrepancies between what they already know and what the passage told them.

Although it may appear that planning, drafting, and revising are linear in nature, in actual reading and writing, they are recursive. For example, planning can continue through drafting. Revising can begin before drafting is completed.

The basic intersection between reading and writing, then, is that both require the active construction of meaning. Readers do not simply translate words into their individual meanings, rather they integrate, infer, and evaluate as they read, combining information in the text with knowledge they already possess. In the same way, writers choose words with care and organize them so that their readers will understand what they mean.

How Reading and Writing are Different

Researchers also have described differences in the nature of reading and writing. For example, writers must make sense out of what they want to communicate. Readers must make sense out of what someone else has written (17). Furthermore, writers must consider not only what they want to communicate, they must also assume the role of their eventual readers to decide whether others will be able to make sense of what they have written and how they will interpret it (23). Additionally, reading and writing can serve different purposes as meaning is constructed or ideas explored that require different types of thinking (12). While both can be seen as constructive processes, reading and writing can offer related but different routes in covering a topic (15).

The Relationship between Reader and Writer

Another way to consider the relationship between reading and writing is to describe the reader-writer relationship. In both reading and writing, people put themselves in tune with one another (4, 5). For any given text, both its reader and its writer draw upon their knowledge of written language and the world.

The predictions of readers and purposes of writers can be seen as reflections of one another (25). Readers' predictions and writers' purposes can be global and, at the same time,

focused. For example, in reading a book, readers may begin with global predictions about the overall content and treatment of the topic. They also may use global predictions as they read a chapter. Within chapters, however, they may use more focused predictions about paragraphs, sentences, and words. Yet even their more focused predictions are influenced by the more global ones. Similarly, writers can begin with global purposes for a book's content and for each chapter. Within each chapter, however, are focused purposes about paragraphs, sentences, and words. As with predictions, these focused purposes are influenced by the more global ones. For example, each paragraph is influenced by the purposes of the book. When the reader and writer are communicating well, the reader's predictions can be seen to mirror the writer's purposes at all levels.

The reader and writer rely on their expertise in dealing with written language in other ways as well. Knowledge of story structure plays a role in creating and understanding narratives (28). Similarly, knowledge of the ways expository text is organized affects communication between the reader and writer (16). In fact, in many respects, readers and writers draw upon their knowledge of devices or conventions of written language, such as the role of illustrations in complementing text, signals used to relate sentences (for example, "on the contrary"); and headings and subheadings to organize and subordinate ideas

Contributions of Reading to Writing

We know that students learn to read by reading, and that they learn to write by writing Yet we also know that students learn to write by reading. Through reading on their own and hearing different types of literature read aloud, students gain a sense of how written language works

There are some differences between oral and written language, however, and students need to be aware of some of these differences if they are to grow as writers. A number of studies have shown that hearing books read aloud can help even very young children learn how written and oral language differ (29). In addition to differences in word choice and sentence structure, written language contains organizational patterns that differ from those of the daily oral language students encounter. Ample reading experiences offer students opportunities to become acquainted with conventions of print and with the words, sentence structures, and organizational patterns writers use to convey their ideas effectively Research also indicates that having a strong background in literature can contribute to older students' writing performance (18).

Research examining the use of literary models as a means of improving students' writing, however, has yielded less conclusive results. In such studies, teachers first present students with selections from children's literature, then discuss with them the features of good writing present in the selections (21, 26). A possible reason for the inconclusive results of this method may be that it requires more than a brief exposure to good writing to learn how it works. Moreover, it may be that such instruction is not very effective if students are not also given many opportunities to read and to hear literature read aloud. Another problem of writing to a model is that it is not centered on students' own needs, problems, or ideas, which is where most real writing begins. The need to consider a student writer's interests is not always taken into account in using literary models. Research shows that children write more and longer when they choose their own topics (9).

In classrooms where reading and writing experiences work together successfully, students write on a daily basis, and teachers promote a writing environment sensitive to the nature of the writing process. Students also listen to literature read aloud and spend ample time in independent reading. Research shows that by reading works of favorite authors, students can be inspired to try new genres, topics, themes, and techniques in their own writing (3, 6).

Contributions of Writing to Reading

Writing has the potential to help students enhance their reading experiences. As students engage in the process of writing, they can gain insights that contribute to their reading growth, particularly when they share their writing with others who respond to what they have written (17). The hypothesis is that by attempting to construct meaning in their own writing, students learn to construct meaning in the writing of others. In writing, students coordinate the various levels of language that are also important to reading. Students must make decisions about sound-symbol relationships, conventions of print (such as punctuation), the meanings of words, and about how to arrange words at the sentence level and beyond. Through such decision making, students become familiar with the thinking involved to understand what they read. They see for themselves the choices an author must make, such as what to include, where to include it, and what to make major and minor points.

When students share what they have written with others, they become aware that although authors provide information in their texts, they also expect readers to fill in gaps or make inferences. They also learn that if authors do not provide enough information or if they do not provide appropriate information, readers can be mislead or confused. Thus students can become keenly aware of the roles both the reader and the writer play in successful written communication. Moreover, as they become more accomplished writers, students can see that a book is the product of the thinking, or choices, of another human, rather than an authority that cannot be questioned (17).

The Reading and Writing of Young Children

How writing and reading are related for young children warrants special attention. Recent research has provided a greater appreciation of children's early writing efforts, including how they can play a role in a reading program. Conversely, it has suggested ways a reading program can promote young children's writing.

Traditionally, literacy instruction for young children was based upon the premise that at a given time, children would be "ready" to learn to read, and that young children would learn to write only after formal reading, handwriting, and spelling instruction. Current research, however, challenges these traditional ideas. From careful observations of young children at home and at school, it is now known that children are in the process of becoming literate long before they enter school (30). Even before receiving formal instruction, children are developing important understandings about written language through meaningful experiences with the print they observe (such as watching adults write letters) or participate in, either on their own or with others (such as through bedtime stories or through "writing" a

letter to a grandparent). Children differ in the literacy encounters they experience and bring to school. Nevertheless, growth in literacy is characterized by a gradual adding on to what children know rather than by carefully defined stages. Because literacy emerges as a set of abilities (rather than begins at some point), many have adopted the term, "emergent literacy"

Writing and young children's growth as readers. Even before children write in a conventional manner, their writing can reveal their development of understanding of written language. Children's explorations in writing not only help them construct insights about that form of language but also complement their experiences in learning to read. Through writing, children

(1) come to understand that writing can represent spoken language but that there can be differences between the two as well;

(2) strengthen their understandings of the concepts of word and letter;

(3) become further aware of the conventions of print (such as left to right, top to bottom directionality, spacing between words, punctuation);

(4) enhance their phonemic awareness, or knowledge that speech can be segmented into separate sounds, as they account for sounds they hear through letter representation;

(5) focus their attention on details of print, such as letters within words that might not be attended to during reading;

(6) recognize that there are consistencies in the spelling of words;

(7) learn that written language can serve many purposes in their daily lives and can be found in various forms.

A Final Word

Current research shows that linking reading and writing can be beneficial. As a valuable tool for thinking, writing can promote students' understanding of what they read (7, 19) Through writing, students can be encouraged to reflect further on what they have read, exploring ideas and forming connections among those ideas. At the same time, however, research shows that writing experiences can vary in their effectiveness (13, 20). Instructional decision making needs to take into account a number of factors that can make writing experiences effective, rather than including writing in a program simply for the sake of including writing (7).

PART TWO
Discussion of Guidelines for Evaluating Reading and Writing Instruction

Research and classroom practice provide support for integrating reading and writing. Writing has the potential to enhance reading experiences, and reading to enhance writing experiences. Furthermore, through opportunities to write, students are more apt to grow as writers. However, some caution is in order: Linking reading and writing may not be beneficial if the two are not linked in sound ways. Even worse, if they have unsuccessful writing experiences, students may eventually lose interest in both writing and reading. Therefore, in examining basal reading programs, evaluators need to consider not just whether the programs provide writing activities or the number of activities they provide, but they must also consider *how* the programs provide writing experiences. The following guidelines are intended to help evaluators determine how basal reading programs present opportunities for the integration of reading and writing.

Writing as a Process

In the view of writing discussed in Part One, writing is not simply a product, but a process that entails: 1) planning, where writers plan and generate ideas, 2) drafting, or composing, and 3) revising, where writers examine whether ideas make sense, discover new ideas, and note changes to be made. It is only after the writer is satisfied with the ideas or content of a piece that he or she should become concerned about its mechanics, such as spelling and punctuation. This part of the writing process is called editing.

What is known about writing as a process has important implications for instruction. Although the writing process entails planning, writing, and revision, writers do not progress through these stages in a linear fashion, rather they do so in a recursive manner. For example, planning can occur both before and during writing. Additionally, not all writers, including student writers, need to spend the same amount of time in each stage of the process. Therefore, it is not instructionally sound to set aside a given amount of time for planning, followed by the same amount of time for writing, and so forth.

Another important implication drawn from knowledge of the writing process is that students' first drafts should be treated as rough drafts, rather than as polished products. Correct spelling and punctuation should not be neglected, but can be developed through revising and editing experiences. It should be acknowledged that producing error-free writing in a first draft is difficult—if not impossible—even for professional writers.

GUIDELINE 1. When examining how a reading program presents the writing process, consider whether
- the writing process is treated as recursive rather than linear
- the program informs teachers about setting priorities in responding to students' writing, with attention to content first and mechanics once the content is established
- the program encourages teachers to treat students' first attempts in writing as rough drafts rather than as polished products.

Writing Activities

Evaluating the nature of the writing activities in basal reading programs involves considering a number of interrelated factors. One factor to consider is that different kinds of writing encourage different kinds of thinking. If, for instance, students are asked to write responses to comprehension questions, they might focus primarily upon separate ideas. Whereas when students write a composition, they not only focus upon separate ideas but also form connections among those ideas. Differences in thinking can also result from what students are asked to focus upon, regardless of whether they are asked to list ideas, write a few sentences, or write long pieces. Asking students to retell a story, for example, requires thinking different from that involved in giving their reactions to a story.

Asking students to write long pieces is not necessarily best or appropriate at all times. For example, prior to reading an expository selection about chipmunks, students can be asked to list everything they know about chipmunks. This listing could be an effective, expedient way of encouraging students to call on their prior knowledge. As well, there can be times when students will profit most from a series of writing activities that build upon one another. For example, before students write a brief report on chipmunks, they might profit from listing what they learned from a reading selection about chipmunks and what they know from other sources. They could then group these ideas under headings before starting on the first draft of their report.

GUIDELINE 2. When examining the writing activities that accompany a basal reader selection, determine if they promote the type of thinking the selection requires.

Prereading writing activities. Writing activities can be presented in a basal lesson as part of preparing students for reading a selection. When they are intended to help students use their background knowledge, writing activities should focus upon important aspects of a selection. The activities should help students tie what they know or have experienced to what they will find in the selection. Writing activities used in setting purposes for reading also can help students direct their attention to important parts of the selection, and can be used to encourage students to ask questions or make predictions about what the selection will offer.

Sometimes, however, writing should not be used as a prereading activity. If, for example, a selection is a continuation of a story students are excited about, asking them to write before they read may dampen their enthusiasm for both reading and writing. Furthermore, a writing activity that is not focused on the "core" on a selection can interfere

with students' comprehension. In general, the recommendations for good oral prereading activities should apply to written activities as well. (Prereading activities are discussed in detail in *Comprehension I: The Directed Reading Lesson*, another booklet in this series.)

GUIDELINE 3. When evaluating prereading writing activities, consider whether they
- help students direct their attention to important dimensions of a selection
- encourage students to ask questions or make predictions about the selection
- should be used at all, or whether some other kind of activity would be better.

Postreading writing activities. Writing activities that follow the reading of a selection should connect with the selection in some way. Again, however, what is important to consider is the type of reading-writing connection suggested by the activities. The writing activities should encourage students to think about important aspects of the selection or to share their own thoughts and reactions. Furthermore, as with prereading activities, students should not be asked to write if some other activity would be more effective or appropriate. For example, students may dread writing responses to a set of comprehension questions, whereas they may enjoy discussing a selection with their classmates. In this case, class discussion might be a better choice for fostering or assessing comprehension. Practice in writing should be reserved for activities that are more interesting to students.

Even if writing activities appear to fit well with reading selections, much also depends upon students' ability to perform the activities. A breakdown can occur if students do not have background information they can draw upon in responding to a writing task. Students will have little to say about topics such as "my trip to the county fair" or "my first pet" if they have never been to a county fair or owned a pet. On the other hand, most students can draw upon their own thoughts and feelings in writing their reactions to a character, event, or message they encounter in a selection. Moreover, asking students to share their reactions lets them see that their thoughts and feelings are a valid part of the reading process.

Students also will be more likely to have something to say if a writing task requires them to draw information from the selection. Students, for example, may be able to write a diary entry from the viewpoint of a character in a story or to write down all they learned about earthquakes from an expository selection.

Teachers' manuals should provide guidelines for helping students succeed in producing the type of writing presented in an activity. If students do not know how to perform a task, the writing they produce may not foster the kinds of thinking intended. More important, students can come to dislike writing when they are placed in situations where they cannot experience much success.

GUIDELINE 4. When evaluating postreading writing activities, consider whether
- the activities encourage students to think about important aspects of reading the selection or to share their thoughts and reactions
- the activities enhance the reading experience
- the teacher's manual offers guidelines about how to help students produce the type of writing presented in the activities.

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Writing and Young Children

Even in kindergarten classrooms, writing instruction can take place along with instruction on letters, sounds, or words. Reports from researchers and teachers provide suggestions about how to implement a successful writing program for young children (6, 10, 14)

These reports show, for example, that children are more apt to write if teachers establish a time for writing or a writing center at the beginning of the year and encourage daily writing (14). In addition, they show that young children approach writing in various ways—through drawing, scribbling, non-phonetic spelling, phonetic or invented spelling, and conventional orthography they know or copy—and that sometimes they may combine several of these, such as drawing with the conventional spelling of family members' names. Furthermore, children may vary in the way they write depending on the task. For example, a child may use invented spelling for shorter pieces but scribble when writing a story.

Daily connected reading experiences are invaluable to young children as they discover writing. Reading aloud to children not only captures their interest in written language but also exposes them to fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selections that they may not be able to read on their own. Children can also become familiar with connected reading through language experience activities, where their own dictated pieces provide material for them to read. Language experience activities expose children to conventions of print and spelling. Some teachers have found that language experience activities can cause children to see more clearly that what they think about and say can be written down.

In shared reading, children learn about reading and writing in much the same way as they do from repeated readings of favorite bedtime stories at home. The teacher reads aloud, then invites the children to read along as he or she rereads the story. Children can also participate in shared reading through listening to taperecorded versions of the story and following the print in the book or through reading with another child. Through shared reading, children are provided the support they need to read literature, enjoying it as a whole while also gaining knowledge of print.

GUIDELINE 5 When examining emergent literacy components of a basal reading program, look for components that
- allow children to approach writing in different ways
- encourage letting young children write early and on a daily basis
- offer teachers guidance about ways young children approach writing and about how to foster their writing growth
- offer children connected reading experiences such as reading aloud, language experience activities, or shared reading so that they can see how print operates in a broader sense.

PART THREE
Teacher Assistance for Reading and Writing Instruction

The suggestions that follow are based on research and practice that focus on the writing process as well as the product. They are intended to help teachers incorporate the information provided in this booklet into their total instructional program.

1.   How can I make writing assignments meaningful and successful?

- Provide a time for students to write on a daily basis. As in reading, students need regular, frequent opportunities to be comfortable with the process and to experience growth.

- Let students occasionally choose their own writing topics. When students write about what they know and have experienced, they can begin with more confidence Eventually students can move from personal narratives to learning about other forms of writing.

- Provide a materials center where students can find lined and unlined paper, pens, pencils, crayons, markers, tape, and staplers.

- Rather than spiral notebooks, use notebook paper and folders kept at the materials center for students' work in progress. Spiral notebooks can be difficult to use in revising, when students may want to view two or more pages at once or cut and tape to make changes.

- As you approach instruction, try to be positive and capitalize upon what students can do, rather than thinking in terms of what they can not do.

2.   What are some prewriting techniques I can use?

- At the beginning of a writing period, provide brief lessons to help students become familiar with the strategies and techniques competent writers know about and use. Rather than just telling students what they could do, think of ways to model or to involve students. For example, if you notice that students need help in selecting a

good title, share a piece you have written and a list of titles you are considering. Explain your thinking as you evaluate the titles, or ask students to help you evaluate them.

- To help students get started, focus an initial lesson on topic selection. Through a think-aloud procedure, share ideas you have considered and talk about the topic you have selected. Then model writing your rough draft, thinking aloud as you write to demonstrate characteristics of this type of writing—crossing out a word rather than erasing, using an asterisk to show where information at the bottom will be inserted, using a caret to add a word.

3   What kind of help should I provide as students write?

- If students ask how to spell a word while writing, tell them to spell it as best as they can in their rough drafts.

- Have brief conferences with students as they are writing. This can help them grow as writers and can enable you to assess individual students. Be specific in pointing out strengths in a student's writing rather than offering general statements. To keep the conference brief, focus upon one thing. Asking a student "What will you do next?" can be a good way to end a conference; it is a way to help you understand what the student is taking from the conference, and to help the student consider what to do next.

- In having conferences, set priorities. Respond to content first. Once the content is established and the student is ready to write a final draft, focus upon mechanics. Even if a student has many mechanical problems, focus upon what you feel is most important rather than overwhelming the student. Help students learn to proofread their work by checking the spelling, capitalization, and punctuation before you meet with them.

- Write while your students are writing, and let them read and comment on your writing just as you read and comment on theirs.

4   How can I get students to revise their writing?

- Provide opportunities for several students to read their work aloud each day. Such opportunities offer students an incentive to revise and improve their work because they see others are interested in what they write.

- Encourage students to respond to each other's writing in a way that is beneficial to the writer.

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- Publish student writing. When students know that others will read what they write, they are more likely to want to revise and improve it. In addition, they feel a great deal of pride when they see their classmates reading a book they have written or see their work displayed on a bulletin board.

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PART FOUR
Listing of Guidelines for Evaluating Reading and Writing Instruction

Guideline 1. When examining how a basal reading program presents the writing process, consider whether
- the writing process is treated as recursive rather than linear
- the program informs teachers about setting priorities in responding to students' writing, with attention to content first and mechanics once the content is established
- the program encourages teachers to treat students' first attempts in writing as rough drafts rather than as polished products.

Guideline 2. When examining the writing activities that accompany a basal reader selection, determine if they promote the type of thinking the selection requires.

Guideline 3. When evaluating prereading writing activities, consider whether they
- help students direct their attention to important dimensions of a selection
- encourage students to ask questions or make predictions about the selection
- should be used at all, or whether some other kind of activity would be better.

Guideline 4. When evaluating postreading writing activities, consider whether
- the activities encourage students to think about important aspects of reading the selection or to share their thoughts and reactions
- the activities enhance the reading experience
- the teacher's manual offers guidelines about how to help students produce the type of writing presented in the activities.

Guideline 5. When examining emergent literacy components of a basal reading program, look for components that
- allow children to approach writing in different ways
- encourage letting young children write on a daily basis
- offer teachers guidance about ways young children approach writing and about how to foster their writing growth
- offer children connected reading experiences such as reading aloud, language experience activities, or shared reading so that they can see how print operates in a broader sense.

PART FIVE
Worksheets for Evaluating the Writing Instruction in Basal Reading Programs

Some important aspects of writing instruction have been discussed in this booklet and summarized in the guidelines. The following three worksheets will help you use the guidelines to evaluate how writing is integrated with reading in basal reading programs

Specific directions for using the worksheets appear on each one. General directions and some additional information about worksheets appear in the *Leader's Manual*.

Materials and Resources Needed

You will need at least one copy of each worksheet for every reading program you plan to evaluate. You also will need:

Teachers' manuals

Student textbooks.

Points to Keep in Mind

1. Writing activities may have various labels. To get a clear understanding of how a reading program interprets writing and what the labels mean, read the introductory information the program provides about its features.

2. Some parts of the worksheets may not apply to the specific activity you are evaluating. Empty spaces do not necessarily mean that a program is inadequate.

Rating What You Have Evaluated

You may wish to develop a rating scale of your own to quantify your overall evaluation We have included space on the worksheets for you to record your ratings.

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READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION

Publisher_____ Program _____ _____ Grade Level _____ Copyright _____ Evaluator _____

GUIDELINE 1 THE WRITING PROCESS	Comments:	Rating:

Examine the teacher's manual to determine whether and how information about the writing process is presented to students.

Also determine whether and how background information about the writing process is presented to teachers.

1 Does the manual

   a. treat the writing process as recursive rather than linear in nature? For example, are all students asked to prewrite one day, write the next day, revise on the third day?

   b. inform teachers about setting priorities in responding to students' writing, with attention to content first and mechanics once the content is established?

   c. encourage teachers to treat students' first attempts in writing as rough drafts rather than as polished products?

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Publisher _____ Program _____ _____ Grade Level _____ Copyright _____ Evaluator _____

GUIDELINES 2, 3, 4 WRITING ACTIVITIES THAT ACCOMPANY READING SELECTIONS	Comments:	Rating:

Examine the teacher's manual to determine whether and how the program integrates reading and writing.
 	
Read the selection prior to evaluating the writing activities that accompany it.
 	
1. What kind of thinking does the selection require? Do the writing activities promote this kind of thinking?
 	
2. Do prereading writing activities
 	
  a. help students direct their attention to important dimensions of the selection and encourage them to become involved in it?
 	
  b. encourage students to ask questions or make predictions about the selection?
 	
  c. serve a purpose? Would some other type of activity work better?
 	
3. Do postreading writing activities
 	
  a encourage students to think about important aspects of reading the selection or to share their thoughts and reactions?
 	
  b enhance reading experiences?
 	
  c. contain guidance in the teacher's manual about how to help students produce the type of writing required?		

READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION

Publisher _____ Program _____ Grade Level _____ Copyright _____ Evaluator _____

GUIDELINE 5 EMERGENT LITERACY	Comments:	Rating:
Examine the teacher's manual to determine the type of background information presented about emergent literacy. Do the instructional activities a. allow children to approach writing in different ways? b. encourage teachers to let young children write on a daily basis? c. offer guidance about ways young children approach writing and how to foster writing growth? d. offer children connected reading experiences so that they can see how print operates in a broader sense?		

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PART SIX
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SELECTIONS IN THE BASAL READER

**A Guide to Selecting
Basal Reading Programs**

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CONTENTS

PART ONE
Research and Practice

When students are given reading opportunities that excite and delight them as well as help them master the skills and strategies of reading, they are likely to become not just school readers but lifelong readers. Sadly, some students who can read, choose not to, others see reading as just another school task (3)

For many students, reading opportunities in school are tied to the basal reader, or student textbook, which is the core of a basal reading program. Basal readers are usually anthologies that contain fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selections. Because these selections are the basic (and sometimes the only) reading fare of young students, you will want to pay particularly close attention to their instructional and literary quality as you choose a basal reading program

The purpose of this booklet is to provide information that can assist you in determining the quality of basal reader selections

THE BASAL READER AND READING INSTRUCTION

A basal reading program consists of teachers' manuals, workbooks, skillsheets, tests, and student textbooks that set forth a unified reading curriculum. The reading selections in a basal program, therefore, do not exist in isolation, they are part of an integrated instructional program Accordingly, each selection should contribute to the unity of the program. The following discussion will look first at the role of basal reader selections in early reading instruction and than at instruction in selections for intermediate-grade students

Basal Readers and Early Reading Instruction

Most program developers employ authors to write original selections for the early levels of their reading programs. The majority of these selections are simple stories. Developers use simple stories for at least two reasons. First, children enjoy stories, and so are motivated to read them. Second, by the time many children begin to read, they are already familiar with the elements and organizational patterns of stories from hearing nursery rhymes and fairy tales and from following simple stories in picture books (5)

To reinforce and develop the word identification skills students are being taught, the stories for early levels of basal programs usually are written with a controlled vocabulary featuring words chosen according to one—or both—of two criteria. 1) they are useful words that appear with frequency in the language and are thus likely to be in children's vocabularies,

or, 2) they are words that exemplify the letter-sound relationships being introduced in the program's instruction (2). Reading, of course, is more than recognizing words, it is a process of constructing meaning from written text. Stories for students who are just beginning formal reading instruction must do more than reinforce word identification skills, they must engage students in meaningful encounters with printed language. The following discussion will focus on ways that basal selections can accomplish these two goals

Word identification instruction. Fluent reading and fast, accurate word identification are important goals of early reading instruction. Students must become so familiar with letter-sound relationships and words that they are able to identify words with little conscious attention (2). The research indicates that this happens more readily if the stories students read contain a high proportion of the letter-sound relationships and other word identification skills they are being taught as part of a program's instructional component (2). However, an analysis of eight best-selling basal reading programs undertaken several years ago showed little connection between the letter-sound relationship lessons in most programs and the words contained in the selections in the basal readers (7). An examination of many of the more recent programs gives the same impression.

One explanation for this situation is that most reading programs introduce familiar words first. The problem with familiar words, however, is that the relationship between the spelling and pronunciation of many of these words is often irregular (*said*, for example, which, if its pronunciation were regular, would rhyme with *raid*) (2).

The traditional sequence for introducing letter-sound relationships involves first teaching students consonant sounds, then short vowel sounds, the : long vowel sounds in regular words. When programs using this sequence seek perfect regularity between spelling and pronunciation, using only the letter-sound relationships already taught, the result can be a sentence as deadly as "The fat cat sits on the mat."

As *Becoming a Nation of Readers* notes, one key to writing meaningful selections for young students may be more flexibility in the choice of the order for teaching letter-sound relationships Letter-sound relationships can be introduced in selections in a sequence that allows early use of as varied as possible a set of words while still exemplifying the alphabetic principle Selections can include some useful irregular words without confusing students. In addition, selections can sometimes include regular words that embody letter-sound relationships that haven't been introduced yet, but are needed to make stories meaningful and interesting The important point is that a high proportion of the words in the stories students read should conform to the letter-sound relationships they have already been taught (2)

Meaningful encounters with print. The process of constructing meaning from print begins when young children learn to recognize the story lines and organizational patterns of the nursery rhymes and other stories read aloud to them. When the stories in basal readers closely follow the kinds of story lines and organizational patterns students have come to expect from their early experiences—that is, if the stories are predictable—then students find it easier to determine and remember their important ideas (29) Young readers also find it easier to connect the parts of a story when the organizational pattern is clear.

Yet because authors are so constrained by the limited number of words they can use in writing for basal programs, often what they write may not be stories at all, but merely strings of sentences with no predictable organization (9). To construct meaning from such sentence strings, students have to rely on information from illustrations and from the teacher and class discussions (2).

Whether an encounter with a story is meaningful for students can also be affected by the way language is used. Stories that use language in unnatural and unfamiliar ways can pose problems for young readers. Students understand a selection better when it conforms to their own speech patterns (27). For example, first-grade students do not often say "There is a dog. See the dog. The dog is big." They are more likely to say, "There's a big dog."

In summary, selections for young readers should attempt to meet the instructional requirements for a controlled vocabulary and at the same time tell a story in a meaningful way. Preparing such stories is a challenge for program developers, to be sure. But it is not an impossible one.

Basal Readers and Intermediate-Grade Reading Instruction

Intermediate-grade students still have a great deal to learn about reading, even when they become proficient at word identification and at understanding simple stories. As they develop reading proficiency, however, these students must begin to think of reading not as a separate school subject but as integral to learning. Selections for intermediate-grade students must prepare them to read their subject-matter textbooks, give them opportunities to develop an appreciation of literature, and help them to become independent readers. The following discussion will examine each of these areas.

Subject-matter textbooks. The transition from simple stories to subject-matter textbooks is difficult for many students (16). This may be because textbooks are nonfiction works, and early levels of basal readers contain only a few nonfiction selections. Nonfiction, of course, makes different demands on readers than does fiction. Quite obviously, nonfiction uses expository, or informational, writing, while fiction relies on narrative writing. But less obviously, since expository writing is generally used to transmit information about the world, nonfiction topics can be complex, unfamiliar, and even unique.

To help them make the transition to subject-matter textbooks, basal readers for intermediate-grade students need to contain increasing numbers of nonfiction selections that reflect a variety and complexity of topics and organizational patterns. The following discussion will look closer at each of these considerations.

Selection topics. Nonfiction selections may be about topics that are new or relatively unfamiliar to students. While an unfamiliar topic can add to the interest of a selection, it can also detract from its comprehensibility. This problem is compounded because nonfiction selections often stand alone, with few if any content relationships among them. For example, one passage is about ancient Egypt, another is about lacrosse. Students are seldom required to use what they learn in one selection to help them understand another (8).

Coherence. Even when a selection is about a familiar topic, it may be difficult for students to understand if it lacks coherence. Coherence refers to the relationships between and

among ideas in a selection. In a coherent selection, it is easy for students to identify or infer the main idea and the relationships among supporting ideas.

Any number of factors can disrupt or destroy the coherence of basal reader selections. Among these are introductions that are only weakly related to the content of the selection, poor use of headings, digressions, too many subtopics, ambiguous or indirect references, and inadequate summaries.

One group of researchers found that many nonfiction selections in basal readers lacked coherence (8). The selections they examined often contained passages of text unrelated to the main topic of the selection, which served to draw the reader's attention away from the main topic. They observed that some of the selections were nothing more than loose collections of ideas, with no rationale for why they were placed together.

The significance of these findings is that coherence affects comprehensibility (6) The ease with which students can determine the main idea of a selection, for example, affects their ability to comprehend it. The ability to identify and comprehend a main idea in a textbook is crucial.

Organizational patterns. Subject-matter textbooks use a variety of patterns to organize ideas and topics. These include

- a simple listing of ideas or topics in which the order of presentation is not significant;
- a chronological, or time-order, arrangement;
- a compare-contrast arrangement;
- a cause and effect arrangement, or
- a problem-solving pattern.

There are "signals" in a nonfiction selection that can help students identify organizational patterns being used These signals include introductory statements, headings, or summary statements, as well as certain words or phrases such as "in contrast," or "first," "second," and so on.

Several studies have shown that when students learn to identify organizational patterns, they are better able to comprehend their subject-matter textbooks (4, 23).

Literature. For young students, responding to literature may mean nothing more than saying, "I loved this story!" or "It's awful!" To help students move beyond these simple reactions, intermediate-grade fiction selections should provide opportunities for reflection, discussion, and elaboration. In addition, these selections should introduce students to the literary elements they will need to know to understand and appreciate increasingly complex literature

One approach for developing literature appreciation is called *reader response*. Proponents of reader response view reading as an interaction of the reader and the text, in which the reader draws on imaginary worlds or personal experiences to explore the complex plots and settings of stories from the inside By tying their familiar experiences with what they read, they are able to see their own experiences from different perspectives and to discover new connections between literature and real life (14)

Reader response can be seen as complementary to *literary analysis*, which provides students with the concepts and terms they need to discuss literature and to develop a deeper

preciation of how it works (26) Although intermediate-grade students may not be ready for extensive instruction in literary analysis, they do need to become aware of literary elements, such as characterization, setting, plot, theme, and style.

Characterization and setting. Characters are the who of a story—the people—or, in children's literature, the animals or elements—it is about. The setting is where and when a story takes place

Characterization refers to the attributes that make a story's characters credible and complete, and to the ways in which the characters are presented to the reader Authors make their characters credible and complete by using descriptive writing to portray them and their actions and by using dialogue to give readers insight into how the characters feel or think.

A crucial aspect of characterization is consistency. Traditional literary criticism speaks of the unity of character and action, in other words, characters must act in ways that are consistent with the picture that has been presented of them and with the other elements of the story.

Characters can be fully or minimally developed, depending on the needs of the story. Modern fiction, with its emphasis on the individual, often features fully developed, complex characters Folktales, on the other hand, make do with a stock cast of characters—the evil stepmother, the charming prince, the innocent maiden—because the plot carries the story

In a well-written story, the setting is appropriate to the plot and characters and is important to the actions that take place. As with characters, writers develop settings through description, and settings may be minimally or fully developed A minimally developed setting may serve as a backdrop to an action, while a fully developed one may be an integral part of the plot.

Research has focused on ways characters and settings engage students' interest. Even young children have a well-developed sense of character, and they seem to prefer characters who act in consistent and credible ways (9, 12). However, some basal reader stories written for children offer little insight into characters' feelings, motives, or goals (9, 11, 28). Lacking this insight, students are not engaged by many of the characters in basal stories or by the stories themselves (11, 12).

Research, then, supports the obvious—stories with engaging characters and settings are inherently more interesting and motivating to students than are blander stories

Plot Plot refers to the sequence of events in a story—the actions and conflicts in which the characters participate In most fiction for children, the events are presented in chronological order. Occasionally a story presents events out of sequence, using either flashbacks or flashforwards. But regardless of how the events are presented, a complete story has a plot with a beginning, a middle, and an ending.

The beginning of a plot usually lies in conflict. Typical conflicts are those between characters or between a character and nature or between a character and society Sometimes the conflict is internal– within a character's mind In the beginning of a plot, these conflicts are unresolved, and they therefore engage a reader's interest. The plot, in effect, describes how the conflicts are resolved through a sequence of events, or action.

In most stories the action builds steadily until it reaches a climax. At the climax, the conflicts are resolved A typical climax might feature a final confrontation between two

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characters. After the climax comes the denouement, in which the story winds down, loose ends are tied up, and characters resume their lives.

Not all children's stories follow such a clear-cut pattern of action. In some, the action is relatively flat and lacks strong climaxes. Other stories, particularly novels, may follow an episodic pattern in which each chapter is a self-contained story with its own climax.

A great deal of research on basal reader fiction has centered on plot. From it we have learned that young children quickly develop an understanding of plot (5, 11, 12), and that selections with clearly articulated plots are more comprehensible and more interesting to children than are selections with weak plots. In addition, we know that stories told in chronological order are particularly comprehensible to children, and that stories without strong conflict or action are less engaging to them (5, 11, 12).

The general conclusion to be drawn from research on plot is that children prefer, and more readily understand, stories with strong, active plots that proceed in a suspenseful, but coherent, manner.

Studies also have shown that students are better able to comprehend a story if they can use a set of rules to anticipate particular organizational components and sequences of events in its plot (24, 33). In recent years, some researchers have looked with interest at *story grammar* as a method for helping readers understand how the different parts of a plot fit together. A story grammar is a rule system created for the purpose of describing the regular features of a particular kind of text (22). The rules describe the components that make up a well-formed plot, the way the components are arranged, and the relationships among them.

Theme. The theme of a story is its underlying purpose—why the author wrote it. In well-written stories, the theme is developed from the actions, and not imposed upon it Themes may be explicitly stated—as in fables—but they are more often left for the reader to discover. By thinking about the characters and events of a story, a reader can infer an underlying truth or meaning. The meaning may be unambiguous, but it is more likely to be subject to interpretation. Indeed, authors rarely set out to teach a specific lesson in a story, they are more interested in sharing insights with readers.

Theme in children's literature often revolves around the life of a child. Stories may show children in physical or psychological isolation and then detail their efforts to end the isolation. Or they may depict children's struggles to come to terms with their families or with society Traditional fiction often touches upon issues such as courage, love, and faith. Many modern stories deal with morality, growing up, friendship, and other elements of childhood

There is little research on theme in children's literature, however there is some evidence that children are interested in themes that reflect their interests and concerns (28) Some critics have pointed out that stories evoking emotions such as despair and cynicism are inappropriate for children, because these emotions are not associated with children (19)

Style. Style refers to the way authors use language to tell their stories Critics have developed an extensive terminology for analyzing style. Two of these terms—sensory imagery and figurative language—relate particularly to children's literature

Writers create sensory images by appealing to readers' senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell If the images are powerful, they draw readers into stories and allow them to experience the story's world.

The use of figurative language such as *similes*, *metaphors*, and *personification* contributes to the overall effect of a story. Through comparisons, figurative language not only enhances sensory imagery but also helps readers perceive the world in new and challenging ways.

Work with even very young children indicates that many of them are aware of different aspects of style, and that they are able to identify authors of unfamiliar stories if they have heard other stories by them (18).

Independent reading. Another vital purpose that can be served by intermediate-grade selections is the promotion of independent reading. Teachers can use the selections as a springboard to independent reading. They can tell students about books by the author of a basal selection, or suggest books or articles on the same topic as a popular selection. They might also use the topic of a basal selection as a theme, such as friendship or courage, around which to organize independent reading.

A number of researchers have demonstrated that the amount of independent reading students do, both in and outside of school, is directly related to gains in their reading achievement (1, 3, 21). In spite of the significance of this finding, the fact is that most students spend very little school time reading. One estimate is that intermediate-grade students spend less than fifteen minutes a day in school reading on their own. Outside of school, most spend less than four minutes a day reading from books – as compared to about 130 minutes a day spent watching television (3). *Teachers and Independent Reading: Suggestions for the Classroom*, the booklet accompanying this series, contains a number of suggestions for ways to incorporate more independent reading into the classroom.

To summarize, selections for intermediate-grade students should extend their early reading instruction while familiarizing them with the reading they must do in subject-matter textbooks and in general literature. Such instruction prepares students to be independent, lifelong readers.

DETERMINING THE DIFFICULTY LEVEL OF SELECTIONS

Matching the difficulty level of selections with the reading ability of the students for whom they are intended is a major concern of teachers. To help them make this match, many program developers provide an indication of the difficulty level of each selection. How do they determine the difficulty level of a selection? Usually with readability formulas.

Readability Formulas

Although there are several different readability formulas, the most commonly used formulas take into account two features of text: the length of the sentences and the complexity of the words (complexity is usually measured by the unfamiliarity of words or the number of syllables in a word). The result of applying the formula is a number that represents the graded "readability level" of the text. For example, a text with a 3.0 readability level is considered appropriate for students at the beginning of third grade, while a text with a 6.5 level is considered appropriate for student in the middle of sixth grade.

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The appeal of readability formulas is that they are easy to apply, objective, and give a fairly good prediction of how difficult typical students will find the text. In the past decade, however, readability formulas have been subjected to a great deal of criticism. Some researchers contend that the formulas provide a misleading indication of text difficulty because they measure only the objective features of a text and ignore such subjective features as style, idea organization, clarity, the complexity of sentence structure, and reader interest. Others maintain that formulas are unreliable, and can be misused by publishers to yield any desired readability score (13, 20, 32). The following discussion will review each of these criticisms.

Subjective text features. The first major criticism of readability formulas is that they cannot measure subjective text features, such as an author's style or a reader's interest in the subject of the text. Formulas measure only objective features of text. So, for example, when they are applied to a selection with short, familiar words and short sentences, they yield low readability level scores—no matter how complex the meaning and organization of the selection might be. Conversely, when they are applied to selections with long, unfamiliar words and long sentences they produce high readability level scores—regardless of how simple the selection's meaning or its organization. Hemingway's writing would be rated at a low readability level because of his use of short sentences and simple vocabulary. Yet it is not likely that many young readers will easily understand Hemingway's novels or stories.

On the other hand, many books read and enjoyed by children yield high readability scores. According to one formula, Dr. Seuss's *Happy Birthday to You!* has a seventh-grade readability level. Yet *Happy Birthday to You!* is enormously popular with first- and second-grade students, who seem to have no trouble understanding it. This is just one of many cases where the measured readability level and actual difficulty differ greatly because subjective features such as style, organization, and clarity were not considered in the measurement.

Long sentences serve a number of purposes, including the clear delineation of cause and effect. Reducing sentence length can even make a selection *more* difficult for young readers to understand. In dividing one long, compound sentence into two short, simple sentences, for example, connecting words such as *so*, *because*, and *since* are sometimes eliminated. As a consequence, the connection between ideas may be lost or become vague. "The boy laughed because he heard a joke" leaves no doubt as to the cause and effect. In contrast, "The boy laughed. He heard a joke" is ambiguous. The boy might have laughed before he heard the joke, or for reasons unrelated to the joke. When the connective "because" is eliminated, readers no longer have any explicit clues about cause and effect, and they must infer a causal connection between the two sentences. By the same token, less familiar, or long words can be more precise and easier to understand than familiar, short ones—*president* is more precise and conveys a clearer meaning than *boss*.

Reliability. A second major criticism of readability formulas is that they often produce inconsistent results. Different formulas applied to the same passage can give significantly different scores. Depending on the formulas used, a given passage may yield readability scores ranging across three grade levels. And, because only selected passages (usually three) in a selection are measured, a single formula may give several readability scores for the same selection.

Adaptations and Excerpts

While whole pieces of literature are included in many programs, excerpts and adaptations of longer works are still widely used. It is with these excerpts and adaptations that the problems created by the use of readability formulas are most apparent (17)

Program developers often draw their selections from existing works that have high readability levels. Then they adapt or shorten them to match the appropriate difficulty level. It is relatively easy to lower the readability level of a selection merely by cutting sentence length and choosing shorter words. However, readability formulas were never intended as a prescription for how to write text. When they are used to rewrite a selection "to formula," the result can be a loss of the style that made the piece interesting in the first place. In the following example, notice how the adaptation reduces the text to a bland recording of events.

Example

Original: They stopped in front of a tumbled-down old brown house. The wind rustled leaves in the yard. A thorny bush, like a witch's long fingernails, scratched against the house

Adapted: They stopped in front of an old brown house. The wind blew dry leaves around the yard.

The house is no longer tumbled-down, it is simply old. The wind no longer rustles leaves, it just blows them around. And the thorny bush has disappeared entirely. The original creates an eerie mood through the skillful use of verbs, adjectives, and figurative language. The adaptation is sterile and almost devoid of interest

In addition to stripping a selection of style, the practice of shortening sentences and substituting familiar for unfamiliar words can deprive students of the opportunity to learn complexities of syntax and vocabulary and may handicap their understanding of texts that are not written in this simplified manner (20).

Sometimes excerpts from longer texts are made without any substantial rewriting. Excerpted text, however, poses other problems. By removing a selection from its context, valuable background information or explanations may be lost. Removing a chapter from its context in a novel, for example, divorces it from important elements of character and plot development. The same is true when nonfiction selections are taken out of their contexts. For example, an excerpt from a science textbook on how blood circulates through the body lacks the necessary background information that allows students to see connections between the structure and function of each of the parts of the circulatory system (4). Without such knowledge, students will have a hard time understanding the selection.

In summary, readability formulas are helpful as a first check on a selection's difficulty. This check, however, should be supplemented with other analyses of a selection's clarity, organization, quality, and subject matter.

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THE VARIETY OF SELECTIONS IN A READING PROGRAM

If it is reasonable to assume that students are more likely to become lifelong readers when their early reading experiences are with many different types of selections, then it is also reasonable to expect basal readers to contain a variety of selection types.

Determining the variety of writing types in basal readers is complicated by the array of terms used by different publishers to identify their selections. Some publishers use the terms *literary* writing and *informational* writing, while others use *narrative* writing and *expository* writing. Still others use the term *genre*, and classify their selections as *fiction*, *nonfiction*, and *poetry*. Finally, some publishers avoid all of these terms and instead classify their selections by topic or theme—or they do not classify them at all. This booklet uses the terms *fiction* and *nonfiction*.

Fiction Selections

Fiction takes many forms, from folktales and fables to short stories and novels. Basal readers should familiarize students with a variety of fiction types. The following discussion, intended primarily as a refresher, examines many of the most common types of fiction selections.

Traditional Fiction. Traditional fiction is often called folklore because it consists of stories attributed to common people. With few exceptions, the authors of traditional stories are unknown; their stories were simply passed on orally until story collectors such as Hesiod and Perrault finally wrote them down.

The categories of traditional fiction most often found in basal readers are *myths*, *epics*, *folktales*, and *fables*. Because they occasionally overlap, it is difficult to offer precise definitions for each of these categories. In general, however, *myths*, such as the Greek "King Midas" and the Norse "Balder and the Mistletoe," are stories that have arisen in virtually all cultures as a means of helping the members of a culture explain the mysteries of life and creation. Goddesses and gods as well as humans and fantastic creatures of all descriptions abound in myths. *Epics*, such as "The Ramayana" and "The Adventures of Robin Hood," are long stories in either prose or verse that describe the adventures of a human hero. *Folktales* comprise a vast group of stories involving brisk action, broadly drawn characters, and the eventual triumph of good over evil. They may be brief animal stories such as "The Three Billy Goats Gruff," or lengthy romantic tales such as "Beauty and the Beast." *Fables*, such as Aesop's "The Hare and the Tortoise" or "The Monkey and the Crocodile" from the Jataka Tales, are brief stories that lead to a moral, which may or may not be explicitly stated. The characters in fables are generally animals, but humans, gods, and the elements can also appear in them. The fable remains a popular writing form, and many modern writers such as James Thurber and Arnold Lobel have produced fable collections.

One word of caution—myths, fables, and folktales exist in many versions; be wary of renditions labeled as "authentic" versions.

Modern Fiction. Modern fiction for children consists of original works by known authors. Unlike traditional fiction, which generally consists of short tales featuring the fantastic, modern

fiction most often appears in the form of a novel or short story. The subjects dealt with in modern fiction can be either realistic or fantastic. When modern fiction is included in basal readers, it may be in the form of excerpts from novels or long stories.

Modern realistic fiction can have either contemporary settings such as *Harriet the Spy*, or historical settings such as *Johnny Tremain*. Realistic fiction can tell the story of a child's life (*Anne of Green Gables*) or an animal (*The Black Stallion*), it can be in the form of a mystery (*The House of Dies Drear*) or an adventure (*Treasure Island*). The common thread uniting the different kinds of realistic fiction is a sense that the stories really could have happened.

Modern fantasies can be categorized by their settings: in high fantasy, the setting is entirely imaginative, as in *The Hobbit*; in domestic fantasy, the setting is at least partly realistic, as in *Charlotte's Web*. High fantasies include literary fairy tales ("The Little Mermaid"), mythical epics (the Narnia chronicles), and science fiction (*The White Mountains*). Domestic fantasies include talking animal stories (*The Wind in the Willows*) and stories about people with magical powers (*Mary Poppins*). No matter what their type, fantasies all have at least one implausible element that separates the work from reality and makes it clear that the story never could have really happened.

Nonfiction Selections

Nonfiction is factual prose intended to inform or persuade. While newer editions of basal programs contain more nonfiction selections than older ones, such selections are still under-represented in basal readers. This is unfortunate, because children are naturally inquisitive, and nonfiction selections help them satisfy their curiosity. Young students will often search a library for trade books about their current interests—dinosaurs or cars or the Olympics.

In examining nonfiction selections in basal readers you will find that they may be labeled variously as "articles," "informational writing," "expository writing," "science writing," or any number of other ways. In many cases, it is up to you to decide exactly what kind of non-fiction a selection contains. The following discussion serves as a review of three major types of nonfiction selections: history writing, biography and autobiography, and science writing.

History writing. Selections about history may include chronological accounts, such as a description of the events leading up to the Civil War, or detailed studies of particular eras, such the Great Depression. In recent years, many history writers have moved away from dates, kings, and battles and have concentrated instead on the lives of ordinary people and on the relationship of the past to the present.

It is important to note that not all selections with historical settings are nonfiction. Fiction writers often use historical backdrops for their stories—*Johnny Tremain*, for example—but you should remember that their version of historical events is colored by the needs of their plots.

Biography and autobiography. Biographical and autobiographical selections in basal readers vary considerably in length and complexity, from one-paragraph summaries to detailed works that are several chapters long. Many basal readers use excerpts from well-known biographies, such as Carl Sandberg's *Abe Lincoln Grows Up*, or from autobiographies, such as

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Helen Keller's account of her life.

As with history writing, biographical and autobiographical sketches often are fictionalized, and if this is the case, they should contain introductions informing students that what they are reading is not necessarily factual.

Science writing. Science writing covers a variety of topics, including geography, space exploration, zoology, medicine, and archaeology. Basal reader selections may be about a simple experiment, a scientific discovery, or a complicated biological process. As with history writers, science writers in recent years have moved away from presenting facts and have instead attempted to engage students through storylike writing with vivid details.

Additional nonfiction forms. Other nonfiction selections may be articles from newspapers or magazines explaining, for example, how a president is elected in the United States. Others may be journal entries or interviews, while still others may be reflective or thoughtful essays.

Poetry Selections

Young children delight in the sounds and rhythms of poetry, and this delight remains with them through the primary grades (19). Somewhere between grades three and five, however, something happens, and children's delight in poetry turns to dislike—both of children's and adult's poems (25, 30).

According to one group of authorities on children's literature, young students become alienated from poetry for several reasons (19). First, the poetry selected for them by teachers and program developers does not appeal to children. Often the poems students encounter in school are traditional ones rather than modern ones that deal with the students' experiences and interests. In addition, some poems are too abstract and too difficult (31). Second, students become bored with poetry when they are required to memorize too much of it and when they have to analyze it in detail. Third, students do not encounter enough poetry in school to know whether they like it or not.

An examination of recent reading programs indicates that developers are attempting to address students' lack of interest in poetry by including more—and more appropriate—poems in their basal readers.

Poetry for children does not differ greatly from poetry for adults—both appeal to the emotions as well as the senses (19). However, the emotions evoked by children's poetry are not necessarily the same as those of poems for adults. In terms of children's preferences for poetry, studies show that children do not enjoy meditative poems or poems with a great deal of imagery or figurative language (30), that they prefer narrative poetry, limericks, and lyric poetry to other forms, such as haiku, that they like poems about animals and familiar experiences, and that they do not enjoy poems they do not understand (15, 30).

These findings perhaps reflect the fact that students have few experiences with poetry and tend to prefer what they know best (19). Because poetry may be new to students, they may need instruction in identifying the elements of poetic language, such as rhythm and rhyme, imagery and figurative language, as well as exposure to many kinds of poetry and poetic themes.

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PART TWO
Discussion of Guidelines for Evaluating Basal Reader Selections

Determining the quality of basal reader selections involves a number of considerations—how well they reinforce what is being taught in a program, whether they possess literary merit, whether they are too difficult or too easy for the students who will read them, and whether they are timely and accurate. The guidelines that follow are not intended to be exhaustive, instead, they are intended to focus attention on some important aspects of basal reader selections.

As a caution, remember that although program developers in recent years have made conscientious efforts to eliminate cultural, racial, and sexist stereotypes from their basal readers, you should nonetheless be alert to stereotypic characterizations, both in the language of the selections and in the illustrations that accompany them.

SELECTIONS AND READING INSTRUCTION

Basal reader selections should give students opportunities to practice, extend, and refine the skills and strategies taught in a program. The selections should provide continuity in instruction from level to level, and should reflect important shifts that match the changing needs of maturing readers.

Early Reading Instruction

Evaluating the selections to be read by young students is particularly difficult. Perhaps the advice given by the Commission on Reading in *Becoming a Nation of Readers* is most helpful—each encounter young students have with basal reader selections should both advance their skill at word identification and help them understand that reading is not simply a process of word recognition, but one of bringing ideas to mind (2).

To this end, selections in early levels of basal readers should reinforce and expand the letter-sound and other word identification skills being taught in the instructional component of the program. In addition, they should be meaningful and interesting to students.

A predictable organizational pattern makes it easier for students to gather meaning from a selection and to connect its different parts. This is not to say, however, that all selections must have predictable organizational patterns; sometimes a few surprises can make a selection more interesting.

As most teachers realize, even the speech of a first grader is more complex than that found in the typical basal reader. Language that is oversimplified can be just as difficult for a student to understand as language that is too sophisticated and technical. Comprehension and interest are increased when a selection uses language that is familiar and natural sounding to students. On the other hand, remember that students must be able to *read* a selection. Regardless of how natural sounding it is, a selection won't be read by students if its content is too difficult for them.

GUIDELINE 1. When evaluating the selections that accompany the early instruction in basal programs, determine if, for the most part, they

- reflect the letter-sound and other word identification skills being taught in the program
- have predictable organizational patterns
- use language that is familiar and natural sounding to students
- can be read by the students

Intermediate-Grade Reading Instruction

As students acquire reading proficiency, they need to encounter selections that extend their early instruction and expand their reading experiences. This means, for example, that intermediate-grade basals should contain an increasing number of nonfiction selections that reflect the variety of topics and organizational patterns students will encounter in textbooks and general reading. They should also contain increasingly complex fiction selections that will prepare students for understanding and appreciating different kinds of literature. In brief, selections for intermediate-grade students should prepare them to be independent readers.

GUIDELINE 2. When evaluating the selections that accompany the intermediate-grade instruction in basal programs, determine if

- the nonfiction selections represent a variety of topics and organizational patterns
- the fiction selections use literary devices and techniques found in good literature
- they promote independent reading

TEXT DIFFICULTY

Students can become frustrated by selections that are consistently too difficult for them to read and understand. On the other hand, selections that are consistently too easy do little to promote growth of reading competence. To control the difficulty and appropriateness of their selections, publishers and authors sometimes "write to formula." This practice often creates more problems than it solves, particularly when it is used in adapting or excerpting selections from longer or more difficult works.

Readability scores. While readability scores can be useful as a first check on the difficulty of a selection, they should be supplemented with checks that focus on word usage and clarity of

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sentence structure. As discussed in Part One, substituting short words for long ones may lead to ambiguity in meaning—long words may be more precise—and to a loss of style. In addition, reducing sentence length may disrupt the logical organization of ideas in a selection

Perhaps the most valuable check on the difficulty of a selection is the judgment of experienced teachers and their knowledge of how well their students can handle its ideas and language.

GUIDELINE 3. When considering the difficulty of a selection, supplement readability scores with analyses of the selection's

- use of words
- clarity of sentence structure
- organization of ideas.

Adaptations and excerpts. Using readability formulas to adapt selections for a reading program can produce the same problems that occur when they are used to write selections specifically for a program. The practice of substituting short words for long ones, dividing long sentences, and eliminating connectives not only makes a once-exciting selection bland, it poses comprehension problems for students. By the same token, excerpts that have been taken from context or that are presented without important background information or detail also create comprehension problems

To find out which selections are adaptations and excerpts, check the list of acknowledgements at the beginning of the basal reader (some programs may put this information on the selection's title page). This information can guide you to the original version of the selection. By comparing the adaptations and excerpts with the original versions, you can determine whether they accurately reflect the meaning of the originals and whether they have retained the essential elements and style

GUIDELINE 4. When comparing adapted or excerpted selections with original text, determine if they

- contain enough background information and detail to enable students to understand them
- have retained the style and interest of the original versions

THE VARIETY AND LITERARY QUALITY OF BASAL READER SELECTIONS

Basal readers should provide students with a variety of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selections, and these selections should reflect the same characteristics that mark all good writing. In general, the selections in basal readers should differ from children's literature only in degree, not kind

Selection Variety

There are no hard and fast rules as to which genres are appropriate for which age, different publishers emphasize different genres at different levels of their programs. Nor is it clear *how many* selections of each genre should be included in a basal reader. It is reasonable to expect, however, that an entire kindergarten through eighth grade reading program include representative samples of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.

These samples should include traditional fiction, modern fiction, a variety of nonfiction selections, including articles and essays, biographical and autobiographical sketches, and excerpts from science, mathematics, and social science textbooks, and poetry.

GUIDELINE 5. In examining the entire collection of selections in a basal reader, look for a representative mixture of traditional fiction, modern fiction, nonfiction, and poetry

The Quality of Fiction Selections

Stories in basal readers, particularly those for younger students, have been criticized for not preparing students for reading general literature (10, 12). Basal fiction *should* possess the same elements as general fiction. Characters should act in credible ways and have clear feelings, motives, and goals, settings should be consistent with the characters. Plots should proceed in a suspenseful and coherent manner and have beginnings, middles, and endings. Themes should be meaningful to children, and styles should create sensory images and use language effectively. Quality fiction requires that all of these elements interact to produce a unified whole. It is only when students can identify the specific elements of a story and see how they work together that they can move beyond such superficial responses as "I loved it!" or "It's the worst thing I've ever read!" to true literary appreciation and understanding

GUIDELINE 6. When evaluating the literary quality of fiction selections in basal readers, look for
* credible characters
* settings that are consistent with the characters
* strong plots with clear beginning, middles, and endings
* themes that are meaningful to children
* engaging styles and language usage

The Quality of Nonfiction Selections

An important consideration in determining the quality of nonfiction selections is whether they can be understood by the students who will read them (8). For example, because nonfiction selections often stand alone with few, if any content relationships among them, students may be unable to use what they learn in one selection, which may be about a difficult or unique topic, to help them understand another. In addition, original articles often have to be cut drastically in adapting them for basal readers, and even selections written specifically for a program are usually constrained by space limitations. The result is that a selection may merely "mention" ideas rather than develop them fully. Explanations accompanying nonfiction

selections should help students make topic connections and familiarize them with new or unusual subjects. Even when topics are familiar, however, nonfiction selections may lack coherence, which can also contribute to a their difficulty. Relationships between and among ideas in a selection need to be clearly stated or easily inferred

A word of caution—it is not always easy to determine if a basal selection is nonfiction Many fictional stories have historical settings and characters, many biographical sketches are also fictionalized. To make selections about science or mathematics more interesting, writers sometimes use fictionalized characters and events. While this may be a good way to introduce students to difficult topics, it also can blur their understandings of the distinctions between fact and fiction. And when such writing occurs often, it can deprive students of opportunities to read—and learn to understand—the kind of expository writing they find in their subject-matter textbooks. You need to examine the student introductions accompanying such selections to see if they let students know that a seemingly nonfiction account has been fictionalized Further, you should examine selections to ensure that the information they present is accurate

GUIDELINE 7. When evaluating the literary quality of nonfiction selections in basal readers, look for

- explanations of content that may be unfamiliar to students
- coherent text in which relationships between and among ideas are clearly stated or easily inferred
- introductions clearly identifying text that has been fictionalized
- accurate information.

The Quality of Poetry Selections

The poetry selections in basal readers should reflect a variety of types of poems and subjects While research shows that students prefer poems that rhyme and that are humorous (15), this may be because they have had little experience with other kinds of poems. Basal readers should offer poems that provide opportunities for students to expand their interests.

Good poetry appeals both to the emotions and to the senses, and it presents subjects in an imaginative, creative way. Good poetic language is rhythmical, but it does not have to rhyme (students need to learn how to differentiate between verse, such as jumprope and Mother Goose rhymes, and poetry).

If a poem contains figurative language or imagery, the language or imagery should be appropriate to children, and it should contribute to the tone and meaning of the poem

One suggestion—because young students have few opportunities to experience poetry, it is probably unwise to overuse poems to teach other things, such as vowel sounds, or to place too much emphasis on the "mechanics" of a poem by having students mark the rhyme scheme of every poem they read

GUIDELINE 8. When evaluating the literary quality of poetry selections in a basal reader, look for a variety of poetry types and subjects that

- appeal to the emotions and senses of students
- present subjects in imaginative and creative ways
- contain appropriate examples of figurative language and imagery.

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PART THREE
Teacher Assistance for Selections in Basal Readers

The suggestions that follow are based on research and effective practice. They are intended to help teachers incorporate the information provided in this booklet into their total instructional program.

1   How can I use basal reader selections as a basis for extended reading?

- Supplement the reading program with literature units, and build skills, strategies, and writing activities around a short story, novel, or nonfiction book

- Become familiar with a number of children's books, then talk about them with your students so as to encourage them to read a variety of books.

- Read aloud to your students from a variety of literary genres.

- Develop writing activities that go along with reading selections—have students write their personal responses to fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.

2   How can I encourage my students to read more on their own?

- Use the fact that many selections in basal readers are adaptations or excerpts as an opportunity to have your students read the original story or book.

- Recommend other books by an author your students like

- Use the reading of a basal selection as an opportunity to encourage students to read more on the topic of the selection or on a topic mentioned in the selection For example, when students read a fiction selection with an unusual setting, suggest nonfiction books or articles that will tell them more about that setting

PART FOUR
Listing of Guidelines for Evaluating Selections in Basal Readers

GUIDELINE 1. When evaluating the selections that accompany the early instruction in basal programs, determine if, for the most part, they

- reflect the letter-sound and other word identification skills being taught in the program
- have predictable organizational patterns
- use language that is familiar and natural sounding to students
- can be read by the students.

GUIDELINE 2. When evaluating the selections that accompany the intermediate-grade instruction in basal programs, determine if

- the nonfiction selections represent a variety of topics and organizational patterns
- the fiction selections use literary devices and techniques found in good literature
- they promote independent reading

GUIDELINE 3. When considering the difficulty of a selection, supplement readability scores with analyses of the selection's

- use of words
- clarity of sentence structure
- organization of ideas.

GUIDELINE 4 When comparing adapted or excerpted selections with original text, determine if they

- contain enough background information and detail to enable students to understand them
- have retained the style and interest of the original versions.

GUIDELINE 5 In examining the entire collection of selections in a basal reader, look for a representative mixture of traditional fiction, modern fiction, nonfiction, and poetry

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GUIDELINE 6. When evaluating the literary quality of fiction selections in basal readers, look for

- credible characters
- settings that are consistent with the characters
- strong plots with clear beginnings, middles, and endings
- themes that are meaningful to children
- engaging styles and language usage

GUIDELINE 7. When evaluating the literary quality of nonfiction selections in basal readers, look for

- explanations of content that may be unfamiliar to students
- coherent text in which relationships between and among ideas are clearly stated or easily inferred
- introductions clearly identifying text that has been fictionalized
- accurate information

GUIDELINE 8. When evaluating the literary quality of poetry selections in a basal reader, look for a variety of poetry types and subjects that

- appeal to the emotions and senses of students
- present subjects in imaginative and creative ways
- contain appropriate examples of figurative language and imagery

PART FIVE
Worksheets for Evaluating Selections in the Basal Reader

Some important aspects of basal reader selections have been discussed in this booklet and summarized in the guidelines. The worksheets that follow will help you use the information in the booklet as you evaluate selections in reading programs.

Specific directions precede each worksheet. Additional information about the worksheets can be found in the *Leader's Manual*.

Materials and Resources Needed

You will need a copy of each worksheet for every reading program you plan to evaluate. Reproduce as many copies as you need. For each program you evaluate, you will also need copies of

- Teachers' manuals
- Student textbooks.

Points to Keep in Mind

1   You may find that you do not need to complete every column or answer every question on a worksheet. Empty spaces do not mean that a program has deficiencies.

2   You may choose to use only parts of each worksheet.

Rating What You Have Evaluated

You may wish to develop a rating scale to quantify your overall evaluation of selections in the programs you are evaluating. We have provided space on each worksheet for you to record these ratings.

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WORKSHEET 1: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINES 1, 2: Selections and Reading Instruction

1. To answer questions 1 through 3, examine at least two selections from each primary-grade program you are evaluating. Record the title of each selection and your comments in the spaces provided

2. To answer questions 4 through 6, examine at least one fiction and one nonfiction selection from each intermediate-grade program you are evaluating. Record the title of each selection and your comments in the spaces provided.

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Publisher ___   Program ___   Copyright ___   Grade Level ___   Evaluator ___

GUIDELINES 1, 2
SELECTIONS AND READING INSTRUCTION

Level	Selection Title	Selection Title	Rating
Primary grades	Comments	Comments	
1 What letter-sound and other word identification skills being taught in reading instruction are reflected in this selection?			
2 Does the selection have a predictable organizational pattern? Comment on whether students who read it will be able to retain and connect its ideas			
3 Comment on the language used in the selection Is it familiar and natural sounding?			
Intermediate grades	Selection Title	Selection Title	
4 Find examples of ways the selection extends and expands early reading instruction	Comments	Comments	
5 Locate and record the kinds of literary devices used in the fiction selection			
6 Identify the organizational patterns used in the nonfiction selection			
7 Comment on ways the selection might be used to promote independent reading			

WORKSHEET 2: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINES 3, 4: Text Difficulty

1   Examine at least two selections—one fiction, one nonfiction—from intermediate-grade basal readers. Record the title and genre of each selection. Choose at least one selection that has been adapted or excerpted from another source.

2   Record the publisher-provided readability rating for each selection. then determine the difficulty level of each on your own and record both ratings.

3. Use the space provided to comment on the use of words, the clarity of sentence structure, and the organization of ideas of each selection

4. Focus on the adapted or excerpted selection and comment on its background information and detail, style, and interest. If possible, find the original version and compare the two.

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Publisher	Program	Copyright	Grade Level	Evaluator

GUIDELINES 3, 4 TEXT DIFFICULTY	Selection Title	Selection Title	Rating
Publisher-provided readability level			
Evaluator-determined readability level (state how it was determined)			
Comment on each of the following aspects of the selection			
1 use of words			
2 clarity of sentence structure			
3 organization of ideas			
Comment on each of the following aspects of an adapted or excerpted selection			
1 background information and detail			
2 style			
3 interest			
Compare this version of the selection with the original possible)			

WORKSHEET 3: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINE 5: Selection Variety

1. Examine the basal readers from two different grade levels

2. Look at the table of contents of each basal reader. See how the selections are grouped and if you can determine from the titles which are fiction and which nonfiction. If the titles do not help you, look at each selection and note on the worksheet how many are fiction, how many nonfiction, and how many are poetry selections

3. Check to see if there are sufficient nonfiction selections in the basal readers intended for prin. grade students and if the number of nonfiction selections increases through the levels of the readers intended for intermediate-grade students

4. Record your comments in the space provided

GUIDELINES 6, 7, 8: Selection Quality

1. Choose two fiction, two nonfiction, and two poetry selections

2. Read each selection carefully

3. Use the points mentioned in the guidelines to evaluate each selection

SELECTIONS IN THE BASAL READER

Publisher _____ Program _____ Copyright _____ Grade Level _____ Evaluator _____

GUIDELINE 5
SELECTION VARIETY

Selection Title (Fiction)	Selection Title (Nonfiction)	Selection Title (Poetry)	Rating

GUIDELINES 6, 7, 8
SELECTION QUALITY

Selection Title (Fiction)	Selection Title (Nonfiction)	Selection Title (Poetry)	Rating

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TESTS IN BASAL READING PROGRAMS

A Guide to Selecting
Basal Reading Programs

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CONTENTS

PART ONE
Research and Practice

The tests of reading ability contained in basal reading programs are often used to make major decisions about students. Yet in spite of the importance of tests in decision making, they are perhaps the most neglected part of reading instruction. Often, in fact, teachers use basal program tests simply because they "come with the package."

When the tests in basal reading programs are adequate to the task at hand and when they are used appropriately, they provide valuable information and guidance. For example, placement tests help determine whether students have the necessary knowledge and skills to begin instruction. Pretests assist in identifying skills that should be emphasized during instruction. Posttests provide information about student progress and instructional adequacy

Because these tests are the major testing component of the instructional program in many classrooms, it is especially important that they be examined carefully with an eye to determining whether they adequately relate to what is being taught and whether they are appropriate for the assessment task at hand. To help you make these determinations, this booklet provides information about some important features of the tests in basal reading programs.

THE PURPOSES OF READING TESTS

The general purpose of tests included in basal reading programs is to provide teachers with information that can be used to make instructional decisions. Testing serves some other purposes as well, both for teachers and for students. We discuss these in this section

How Testing Helps Teachers

Testing can help teachers in several ways (18). First, it can provide information about students' entry knowledge. This information can help teachers set realistic goals for students, then help them determine, refine, and evaluate their instructional program.

Testing can also help teachers determine how well the instructional objectives of a unit or level of a program have been achieved The very act of choosing a measuring instrument can lead teachers to evaluate their instructional objectives to ensure that what they measure reflects what they have taught (5). For example, if a second-grade teacher is using a particular approach to teaching vocabulary words, knowledge about what students are actually learning about vocabulary would help to evaluate the efficacy of that method Tests that follow an instructional unit also can help teachers assess how realistic the goals of the unit were, the

degree to which the instructional objectives were achieved, and the effectiveness of the suggested instructional procedures.

How Testing Helps Students

Testing can also benefit students (5, 18). First, testing can help teachers communicate the goals of instruction to students, and help reinforce the importance of those goals. Second, reviewing tests with students can provide both feedback and learning (18). Third, testing can encourage good study habits by requiring students to review course content. And, finally, testing can be useful in helping students determine whether they have learned the necessary skills and concepts and in helping them formulate questions (5).

Summary. Testing within the basal reading program should be a continuous process important to making decisions that increase the "goodness" of the match between each child an the materials and methods of instruction. The goal of testing should be to find the conditions under which children can and will learn (16). Basal program test users are reminded that test procedures (as well as other types of assessment) do n more than sample a student's true abilities, and none can give a complete picture. Furthermore, student-related factors such as reading levels, vocabulary, and prior knowledge affect the validity of tests. For example, test questions containing vocabulary that is unfamiliar to students may be measuring vocabulary achievement rather than the designated objective.

The focus of this booklet is on *test* features that influence the accuracy of tests Before we discuss these features, we will first briefly review some of the terms commonly used in describing tests, and then describe the various kinds of tests found in a basal program.

Test Terminology

Among the most frequently used terms in descriptions of basal program test components are *measurement, evaluation, norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, reliability, validity,* and *objectives.* The following discussion defines each of these terms

Measurement provides a quantitative description of students' behavior. It quantifies or assigns a number to express the degree to which a characteristic is present. For example, one common characteristic measured by basal program tests is skill attainment or mastery. The number that is used to express skill attainment is a score that reflects the number of items answered correctly An instrument, such as a test, is used to obtain measures of a behavior.

Evaluation is a systematic process of determining the extent to which educational objectives are achieved by students. The two most important aspects of evaluation that you should remember are. (a) it involves a *systematic process* that omits casual, uncontrolled observation, and (b) it is always based on educational objectives (or goals) that have been previously determined. Its primary function is to determine the quality of something. Criteria and standards guide judgments of worth Once you have a measure of something, you compare it to the established criteria or standards to determine whether it reflects an acceptable level of a characteristic.

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Occasionally the terms evaluation and measurement are confused. Remember that evaluation is a more general qualitative and quantitative description of student behavior (such as a formal observation), whereas a measurement is limited to a quantitative description (test scores, for example) (9, 10).

Norm-referenced tests provide scores that indicate how a given student's performance compares with the performance of a representative group of students. Grade equivalents and percentiles are probably the most common forms of norm-referenced scores (4) For example, if a sixth-grade student receives a grade equivalent score of 6.8, she is said to be performing like a typical sixth grader in the eighth month of instruction If, however, a fourth-grade student receives a score of 6.8 on a fourth-grade test, then it is said that he is performing like a typical sixth grader would on a fourth-grade test. *It does not mean that he can read sixth-grade materials*

Criterion-referenced tests provide scores indicating a student's ability to perform specific tasks with reference to a level of mastery, rather than in comparison to other students Such scores can be expressed as percentages or the number of correct responses on a test (for example, 80% correct), analyses of a student's errors (student does not make appropriate text-based inferences), or a relative reading level (that is, independent, instructional, and frustration levels). To better illustrate how criterion-referenced testing works, consider that if on a five-item subtest with a mastery level of 80%, a student gets four out of five correct, then the student is said to have reached mastery of the skill tested.

Reliability refers to how accurately a test measures what it is supposed to measure. That is, how well the test provides the same type of information across test items, over time, or between and among students (12).

Validity refers to three important aspects of a test: how well it measures *what* you want it to measure, how well it measures *all* of what you want it to measure, and how well it measures *nothing else* but what you want it to measure (5)

Objectives are statements of intended learning outcomes that include the subordinate skill, the conditions under which the skill will be performed, and the criteria for acceptable performance (5). The statement "Given the term *index*, list the identifying characteristics of the index" is an example of an objective

Types of Tests in a Basal Reading Program

Most basal reading programs include placement inventories, reading comprehension power tests, end-of-unit tests, end-of-book tests at each level, and individual reading inventories. Many programs also contain pretests and midlevel tests for each grade level. Each of these components is discussed below.

Placement inventories. Placement inventories are group administered and are available in both primary- and intermediate-grade versions These tests are intended to assess students' ability to read at the specific levels designated by the program and to identify students' instructional reading levels. The tests typically include both reading comprehension and vocabulary items

A few words need to be said about the characteristics of placement inventories that are idiosyncratic to this particular kind of test. But first, a word of caution. *placement inventories provide only a "best guess" of where to place students in basal readers.* Placement inventories should

only be used for the purpose of getting started, that is, for obtaining a global measure of reading ability.

A number of factors affect students' performance in ways that make it difficult to predict how they will perform on other passages within a particular level of the series. These factors include the length, type, and familiarity of passages, the number and nature of the comprehension tasks, and the scoring procedure (16).

The most important thing to discover is how a student handles the reading of an actual textbook under conditions that simulate the classroom situation (23). For this reason, placement tests should use passages, both oral reading passages and silent reading passages, taken from the stories in basal readers. In addition, the placement test should include a word identification list to help teachers determine where to start the inventory

Reading comprehension power tests. Power tests are reading comprehension tests designed to assess students' ability to read and understand vocabulary in context and to comprehend passages graded for the level of the program they have just completed.

End-of-unit tests. Unit tests assess the skills and concepts emphasized in a unit of instruction and yield criterion referenced scores to help teachers determine the type of additional instruction students need. Most programs provide alternate forms of end-of-unit tests, which may be administered after additional instruction has been provided or if the teacher thinks the initial assessment was not valid.

End-of-book tests. End-of-book tests give teachers information about students' knowledge of skills and concepts taught within a level of the program. Like the end-of-unit tests, end-of-book tests provide criterion-referenced scores that help teachers decide if more instruction is needed. Alternate forms of these tests also are usually available.

Individual reading inventories. Individual reading inventories help teachers determine the placement of individual students in a particular program. These tests can be used in place of the group placement test when, for example, only a few students need to be tested or when a teacher has no records or other means to determine student placement. Individual reading inventories often employ a cloze procedure. Students read passages aloud and supply words to fill in blanks. The passages usually match the difficulty levels of the reading selections in the program

With this review in mind, we will now examine more closely the features that contribute to accurate and appropriate tests

FEATURES OF BASAL PROGRAM TESTS

Test features of particular concern to teachers and researchers are directions, the format of test questions, the quality of test passages, test validity and reliability, and the match between what is taught and the content of the test. Each of these is discussed below

Directions

How well test directions are communicated to teachers and understood by students is of major concern because of the influence of these directions on students' test performance (5) Such

factors as the way directions are worded and the amount of guidance given in them can influence test results

A study with second graders showed how important the wording of directions can be When the students were given directions reading "Make up just one sentence in your own words that says what all the sentences tell you," only 29% of them could perform the task. When the directions were changed to read "Find the one thing that all of the sentences in the paragraph tell you about," all of the students could perform the task at least 66% of the time (20)

The amount of guidance that directions should offer depends on the skill being measured and the age of the students (5) Example 1 contains illustrations of both a good and poor set of student directions

Example 1

Poor Directions	Better Directions
Read the question and choose your answer	Each question below identifies a kind of biased statement. Read each question and fill in the circle beside the best answer.

In this example, the first set of directions is poor because it fails to indicate what the question is testing and how students are to mark their responses The second set of directions is better because it lets students know exactly what they are to do.

Question Formats

The question formats found in basal program tests are either objective (matching, true-false, and multiple-choice) or essay (including completion items and short answer) Some formats are less appropriate than others for measuring certain objectives. For example, if the objective measured is stated as "Students will be able to organize ideas and write them in a coherent fashion," it would be inappropriate to have students select their answers from a series of possible choices If the objective is to obtain evidence of students' factual recall of names, places, dates, and events, a lengthy essay would be inefficient

The multiple-choice question format is used most often in basal reading tests. Essentially, all multiple-choice questions have the same elements a question stem, answer options, only one of which is correct, and answer foil, or distractors — incorrect options that are supposed to be reasonably attractive to students.

Only a little is known from research about the effects of question stem and answer option variables on student performance Some research has linked the question stem format (for example, "wh--" question versus incomplete sentences) to item difficulty for certain types of students (15). But in general, principles and suggestions for question writing have been guided by tradition and common sense.

Research and practice, however, do suggest a number of things about multiple-choice question formats. The following discussion looks at some of these.

1 *The stem should contain a complete question In contrast, in some items, the stem is part of a sentence for which the answer options form possible completions*

Example 2(a)

Poor Format

The airplane crashed in

    (a) Boston   (b) 1984

    (c) flames   (d) the night

Example 2(b)

Better Format

Where did the airplane crash?

    (a) Boston   (b) 1984

    (b) flames   (c) the night

The question in Example 2(a) is ambiguous because students do not know what information to supply: the year, the time of day, the location, or the condition of the plane. Example 2(b) is much clearer in that students know readily that they are to identify the location of the crash

    2. *The answer options should contain only one correct response.*

In Example 2(a), all of the options make sense. Example 3 illustrates a better item.

Example 3

What happened when the airplane crashed?

    (a) it was demolished   (b) it kept flying

    (c) it got angry   (d) it turned around

In this example, the only option that makes sense is (a).

    3. *The answer options should be parallel in grammatical construction and length and should not give students clues as to the correct answer*

Example 4

To fix a steak over a campfire, what is the first thing you do?

    (a) start a fire

    (b) boil the meat

    (c) find two forked branches and tie them together

In this example, the intended correct option, (c), is also the more elaborate one. To address this problem, the correct option should either be shortened to the length of the other two or the other two options should be lengthened.

    Exar ᵧ c illustrates a question stem that gives students clues to the correct option

Example 5

　　Where does the gray-bodied squid live?

　　　　(a) the gray squid can be found all over the world

　　　　(b) mainly in the southern half of the hemisphere

　　　　(c) along the continental divide

The stem for the correct option, (a), contains a color clue. This could be remedied by removing the mention of the color of the squid from the correct option.

　　4. *Answer options should not use specific determiners, such as "d_____", "acce_____", "none", or "all," in the incorrect responses.*

Example 6

　　How long is a mature giant squid?

　　　　(a) approximately 55 feet

　　　　(b) exactly 100 feet

　　　　(c) never more than 20 feet

　　　　(d) always 26 feet

Students do not need specific knowledge to conclude that the only option that is stated in a less than absolute — therefore reasonable — manner is the correct answer (a).

Test Passage Quality

Many basal program tests require that students answer questions based on information in a reading passage. A number of studies reveal that readers are affected by the quantity of information contained in test passages (19), the density of the information (8, 13), the density of new information (16), the interest level of the content (11), and how concrete and imaginable the content is (21). As a result of these attributes, a passage can either be considerate or inconsiderate of its reader.

Considerate text is defined as text written in such a way that it enables readers to gather the appropriate information with minimal effort. Inconsiderate text requires extra skills, strategies, and prior knowledge to comprehend (2, 3). Test passages are said to be inconsiderate if they make unwarranted demands on readers.

Four aspects of inconsiderate test passages are most likely to be of concern to examiners of basal reader tests: the density of ideas, an overreliance on assumptions, the use of imitation genres, and the use of deceptively simple passages (14). The following discussion examines each of these aspects. *Please note* that in actual tests, any number of these aspects may be interwoven: one inconsiderate feature often leads to the emergence of another.

　　Density of ideas. Test passages can be inconsiderate in the number of ideas that are presented and in the frequency with which these ideas change. The brief passages used in tests sometimes provide too little elaboration of one concept before introducing another. The concepts change too quickly for students to get a clear idea of what is going on. Consider the passage in Example 7.

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Example 7

Copper is a metal. Copper wire conducts electricity very well. Copper pipe is used for plumbing. Brass is made by combining copper with other metals. More copper is mined in the United States than in any other country.

Which statement provides the best summary of this paragraph?

        (a) Copper pipe is used for plumbing.

        (b) Copper is a metal that can be combined with other metals.

        (c) Copper is mined in the United States.

In this example, the ideas in the passage are presented without elaboration and, therefore, the density of the ideas is not conducive to the development of an understanding of the point of the passage. After reading the first sentence, a student might assume that the passage is about the nature of copper; however, the answer keyed as correct is (a)

Overreliance on assumptions. Some test questions require students to make a number of assumptions without corroborating evidence from the passage to permit validation. This can contribute to uncertainty when students must too often try to link their conjectures and guesses about what is going on to what they read in a passage. The passage in Example 8 was written for fourth-grade students.

Example 8

As the machine goes round and round the field, its reel bends the plants over a blade, which cuts the plants close to the ground. The plants are then elevated into the machine, which takes out the seeds. The rest of the plant falls to the ground. Every so often the machine is stopped and the seeds are removed and placed in a truck.

What process does this paragraph describe?

        (a) how fruit is picked

        (b) how roads are built

        (c) how crops are planted

        (d) how grain is harvested

At first glance, this passage may seem easy for fourth graders to understand. But on closer look, it is clear that the passage requires its readers to rely on many assumptions, such as the appropriate meaning of the words "reel" and "elevated" in the first and second sentences, to arrive at a correct understanding of the passage. The readers must also make an assumption about who is controlling the machine — the language implies that the machine is in control. And they must also infer that the blade is part of the machine. The passage gives no clue as to who or what does the elevating of the plants into the machine. Another assumption in the passage is that the seed, not the plant itself, is the valued part of the plant.

This passage is inconsiderate because of the many hypotheses readers must make about it. The inference strategies students have learned to use in school can become tentative and strained when they encounter such passages.

Imitation genres. A variety of literary genres typically appear in basal reading tests. The fiction genre may be represented by passages from folktales, myths, short stories, or

excerpts from novels, nonfiction by personal accounts, letters, excerpts from history or science books, or newspaper articles. Some basal tests also contain examples of poetry.

The inclusion of so many different kinds of writing seems based on the view that reading tests should include the variety of genres students normally read in school. The passages used in tests, however, sometimes violate the conceptual or structural pattern typically associated with the genres they are meant to exemplify. Consider the passage in Example 9.

Example 9

A faucet's handle is connected to a threaded spindle that holds a rubber or fiber disk. If the threaded spindle is turned so that the rubber or fiber washer is pushed down against its seat, no water can get through. If the spindle is turned so that the rubber or fiber washer is lifted off the seat, water can gush through the faucet. Of course, the faucet has to be connected to a water supply first! A faucet may drip if the rubber or fiber washer is worn or if the seat is not almost perfectly smooth. If water leaks around the top of the valve stem, the packing washer may need to be replaced.

What do you turn in order to open and close the faucet?

    (a) the seat
    (b) the handle
    (c) the faucet body
    (d) the packing washer

This test passage was written to imitate the expository writing commonly found in nonfiction selections. Unlike the nonfiction genre it is imitating, however, the passage has no introduction to help students make a link from personal knowledge to new information, no identifiable organizational pattern, and no signal words, such as "because" or "therefore" to tie its ideas together. Students must have some quickly accessible knowledge about threaded spindles and washers even to begin to understand what the passage is saying. Students who are unfamiliar with such things are likely to be at a loss. (Note that one kind of problem, the use of an imitation genre form, creates another, the density of ideas, discussed earlier.)

Deceptively simple passages. Another type of inconsiderate test passage occurs when a concept with which readers are unfamiliar is presented bit by bit in a sequence of seemingly familiar details. In Example 10, something is described bit by bit, then the parts are integrated.

Example 10

Susan picked up another envelope and carefully slid the specimen out. Holding the silver disk by its cellophane wrapper, she said, "This one's my prize. It's a shiny piece with a special edge. It belonged to my grandfather. It's worth a lot as a collector's item, so I won't spend it."

What is this passage about?

    (a) a medical discovery
    (b) a new toy
    (c) a rare coin
    (d) a special candy

As in the passage illustrating the density of ideas, this passage also supplies readers with a lot of unconnected detail. To further complicate things, the vocabulary is deceptively simple — deceptive because the concepts introduced have a range of possible referents. For example, the word "specimen" in the first sentence is referred to in subsequent sentences as "silver disk," "shiny piece," and "collector's item." Because the "whole picture" is never provided by the passage, readers must create a picture by putting together bits and pieces of information in a way that seems to make sense. This can be a problem, however, if readers do not already have the appropriate prior knowledge.

Validity and Reliability

Generally, validity and reliability are likely to be achieved when each test question is clear and unambiguous, when the scoring is objective, and when students are not given extraneous grammatical or contextual clues to the answers, (5, 9, 10, 18). The following discussion looks at several specific factors that can affect the validity and reliability of basal program tests

1. *How well the test matches the instructional objective(s)*

Matching test questions with the instructional objectives stated in the test's directions will not guarantee either validity or reliability. What it will do, however, is provide information useful in deciding what aspects of validity and reliability the test *will* measure For example, if the objective states that giv two different endings to a story, students will justify which is the best ending, then the test question should require students to write an answer (short answer) as opposed to choosing an answer from those provided (true-false, multiple-choice). In this instance, asking students to write an answer is preferred because it matches the objective, which requires justifying as opposed to merely choosing an answer from a list (5).

Example 11 contains an instructional objective, a question item that relates poorly to that objective, and one that relates better to it.

Example 11

Objective	Poor Item	Better Item
The student will write a dialogue between himself or herself and a story character	Directions. Pretend you are a character in the story and tell how you would talk to one of the other characters	Directions: Choose a character from the story and write a dialogue between yourself and the character

Notice that in this example, the conditions specified in the objective do not match the directions in the poor item The objective specifies that a *dialogue* be written by the student The poor item, however, does not tell the student that the response must be in the form of a dialogue. The better item explicitly tells the student to write some dialogue with a story character.

2. *How well defined the test questions are*

The clarity of its questions affects a test's reliability and validity. To ensure valid measures, questions should avoid ambiguity and unintended complexity. Clearly written questions allow students to focus their attention on what is being measured. Questions that are vague, ambiguous, and too global can cause students problems in deciding what they are being asked to do. The scores derived from such questions are unreliable (18).

3. *Whether the test questions are based on information that students should know (or be able to infer from the test passage).*

Because students cannot be expected to commit to memory all of the content covered in an instructional unit, the corresponding tests should not focus on inconsequential details. The problem, of course, lies in determining which information is basic and which is inconsequential (18)

4. *Whether test items contain race and sex stereotypes and biased language and illustrations*

Test questions, passages, and accompanying illustrations should be free of stereotyping and biases. Characters, settings, and plots described in test questions should reflect the positive cultural, racial, and sexual characteristics of students in general. The use of stereotypes and bias in test items can affect the reliability and validity of a test if such items lead students (who are offended by them or who are unfamiliar with the culture-dependent contexts used in them) to answer questions incorrectly (18).

5. *Whether the test contains a sufficient number of questions to measure performance for the objectives.*

There is no formula for determining the minimum number of questions that should be used for a test to be valid. In general, the number of questions is tied to the purpose of the test. For example, end-of-unit tests require fewer questions than end-of-level or book tests, simply because units cover less content. Longer tests, however, give more reliable scores than shorter ones (5).

6. *Whether the questions reflect a representative sample of the goals or objectives.*

Instructional goals and behavioral objectives are essential to the evaluation process. Instructional goals are broad statements of learning outcomes that are limited to what is observable and measureable. Instructional goals include overt behaviors to be described and the content or topic of instruction.

Goals are written to communicate how students will visibly demonstrate internal processes, such as defining, selecting, comprehending, and so forth. An example of a goal for reading might be "To sequence ideas."

A behavioral objective is a statement of what the learning outcome should be, and it includes the skill necessary to complete the task, the conditions under which the task will be performed, and the criteria for acceptable performance.

An example of a behavioral objective is. "Given several events, sequence all of them in the order they occurred." Notice that this objective states the skill necessary to complete the

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task (*sequencing*), the conditions (*given several events*), and the criteria for acceptable performance (*100% accuracy*).

The better the behavioral objective represents the instructional goals, the more reliable the test scores will be (5, 18). For example, a test covering goals that have ten objectives ranging from easy to difficult should include test questions that reflect each objective. If two different forms of the test are used, the second form should also contain questions for every objective. Because they cover the same objectives, the two test forms should produce relatively consistent scores.

7. Whether students can guess answers correctly

Validity and reliability are affected when students can guess correctly at answers. The possibility of students' guessing a correct answer is always present when questions require students to select answers from several choices. Obviously, students who do not know the answer to a two-choice question have a 50% chance of choosing the correct answer. Questions containing three, four, or five choices, however, reduce the probability of guessing correctly.

Guessing can also be discouraged through the use of novel questions. Novel questions are new questions that have not been seen by students in classroom activities or on previous tests. Using novel questions encourages students to use a particular ability to answer a test question, not merely remember an answer they have seen on another test (9, 10).

Identifying the Link Between What Is Tested and What Is Taught

Critics have charged that the most serious problem with basal program tests is that they are not consistent with what is known about the reading process and with how reading is taught (16). Even though many program developers have incorporated a number of research-based instructional practices into their programs, they have not often incorporated research-based innovations into basal tests (7, 11). The mismatch between what is known about reading and how reading is assessed has created a gap between instruction and assessment (22). The following discussion focuses on two areas that will help evaluators determine whether there is a match between what is taught and what is tested in basal programs: the consistent use of language in instruction and tests, and how well the instruction prepares students for the tests.

Consistency of language. Consistency of language means using the same terminology to describe what is being tested that was used to introduce, demonstrate, and practice a skill or concept in the instructional sequence. It seems reasonable to assume that the more consistent the language used to discuss a concept, the easier the concept will be to teach and learn and the easier the test will be to complete.

Teachers' manuals, workbook activities, and informal assessments (such as postreading discussion questions) should be consistent in the way they label and talk about a skill or concept. Likewise, if one subtest in a program is labeled "Finding the Main Idea," similar subtests should not be called something else, such as "Getting the Big Picture."

Adequacy of preparation. The sequence of instruction contained within a lesson should frequently (at least three times) offer practice in the skills or concepts to be tested. If the skills or concepts are only practiced once or twice, then students probably will be ill-prepared to demonstrate their understanding of them.

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In addition, the reading conditions presented by the test should approximate "real" reading conditions. Specifically, just as lessons present related concepts in connection with each story, tests should measure several related concepts in relation to each test passage. Evaluating skills and concepts in isolation does not take into account the complexity and multiplicity of factors that influence how students read outside of the context of the test.

Finally, tests should not be based on the assumption that the order of skill or concept acquisition is invariable. In other words, it is not necessary for students to master a specific skill or concept before proceeding to others and/or to other materials (16). Programs that insist upon a rigid order of presentation and testing in isolation make incorrect assumptions about the reading process (17).

PART TWO
Discussion of Guidelines for Evaluating Tests in Basal Programs

When evaluating the tests in a basal reading program, you should focus on five aspects of the testing program: 1) test directions, 2) test validity and reliability, 3) passage content, 4) question formats, and 5) the match between what is taught and what is tested. The guidelines that follow address these aspects of basal tests.

Test Directions

Among the most important considerations of testing are that teachers know how and when to use a test and that students know how to take it. The following discussion will look closer at test directions for teachers and for students.

Directions for teachers. The directions to teachers for test administration most often are provided in the teacher's edition of the test or in a separate manual accompanying the test. The directions should include the purpose of the test and should give an indication of the most appropriate point in the program to administer it (pretest, practice test, posttest). The directions should also indicate the method for giving students test-taking instructions. Some tests require teachers to give oral instructions, some require students to read the instructions themselves, and some require both of these methods.

Other information that must be in the directions to teachers includes time limits (timed tests should state clearly how much time students will have for each section of the test as well as for the total test) and guidance in how the test results should be interpreted and used.

GUIDELINE 1(a). When evaluating directions for teachers, look for information specifying

- when it is appropriate to administer the test
- whether directions to students should be given orally, in writing, or both
- the time limits
- the purpose of the test
- how the test results should be interpreted and used

Directions for students. Directions for students should be as clear and concise as possible. They should tell students what is to be done, how to do it, and where the answers are to be recorded. When students are instructed to read test directions, the directions must be explicit enough for them to begin the test without any additional instructions.

All directions should be clearly worded and should give students the basis for selecting or supplying the answers. With true-false, matching, and multiple-choice questions, the directions can be relatively simple. For example, a statement such as: "Select the choice that best completes the statement or answers the question" might be sufficient for multiple-choice items.

Directions for how students should record their responses also can be relatively simple. With selection items (such as items that require students to choose an answer from a given set of plausible, alternative choices), students should be instructed to circle, underline, fill-in, or check the correct answer. Students in the primary grades should mark their responses directly on the test itself (rather than on an answer sheet). The test should contain an example of an item that is marked correctly.

On some tests, guessing is not penalized; on others it is. Directions, therefore, also need to tell students whether they should guess or skip a question when they are uncertain of an answer.

With open-ended questions requiring that students write their own answers, the directions should indicate where they are to put the answers and how to compose them (in phrases, complete sentences, or paragraphs, or with an essay).

GUIDELINE 1(b). When evaluating test directions for students, determine if they provide students with clear and concise information about
- the purpose of the test
- the basis for choosing responses
- how answers will be marked
- what to do about guessing answers
- where and how open-ended responses are to be written.

Validity and Reliability

Validity (whether the test measures what it is designed to measure) and reliability (whether it does so consistently) are essential attributes of a test. Validity and reliability depend upon how well test questions match the instructional objectives to which they are tied and how well they reflect the instructional content students are to acquire. In addition, validity and reliability can be affected by how clearly written the questions are and by whether they are written in such a way that will allow students to guess at answers. Questions and passages containing race and sex stereotypes and biased language or illustrations can also affect the validity and reliability of a test. Finally, the number of test questions should reflect the type of purpose of the test if it is to yield valid and reliable results.

GUIDELINE 2. As you evaluate test validity and reliability, look for
- instructional objectives that are tied to the abilities and content tested
- questions that are expressed in clear and unambiguous language
- the use of formats that discourage guessing
- questions and passages that avoid race and sex bias
- the use of a sufficient number of questions to measure performance on a
  representative sample of objectives.

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The Quality of Test Passage Content

Test passage quality is gauged by how considerate the passage is of students. Students reading considerate passages are able to gather the appropriate information from them with ease. In reading inconsiderate passages, however, students must exert extra effort. A passage is inconsiderate when it contains a *density of ideas*. That is, it presents too many ideas and does not explain an idea before moving on to the next one. Another aspect of an inconsiderate passage is an *overreliance on assumptions*. This means that students must draw inferences from a passage with supporting evidence from the passage. Passages written in the form of *imitation genres* pose problems if they lack key elements of the genre with which students are already familiar from selections in their basal readers, such as identifiable organizational patterns or plots. Finally, a test passage is inconsiderate if it is *deceptively simple*. This occurs when a complex topic is presented bit by bit in an unconnected fashion. The straightforward presentation looks simple, but the lack of connection makes the topic difficult to understand.

GUIDELINE 3. As you examine test passages for considerateness determine that they do not
- contain ideas that are too dense
- require readers to make a number of unvalidated assumptions
- use imitation genres
- use deceptively simple language but complex concepts

Question Formats

Question formats should be appropriate for the objective being measured. For example, if the objective is stated as "The student will be able to organize ideas and write them in a coherent way," the multiple-choice question format is inappropriate. Likewise, if the objective is to measure students' recall of names, places, dates, or events, the essay question format is not necessary.

The multiple-choice question format is the most commonly used in basal program tests. For these questions to yield valid and reliable results, they should be properly constructed, with clear question stems and grammatically correct answer options and answer options that are free of extraneous clues, such as the use of "always," "never," "all," or "none."

GUIDELINE 4. As you evaluate test question formats, determine if they
- are appropriate for the objective being measured
- are clearly stated
- have grammatically correct answer options that are free of extraneous clues

The Match Between What Is Taught and What Is Tested

During the past decade, basal program tests have been criticized for treating reading as an aggregate of isolated skills and for conveying the idea to teachers and students that reading is a static process. They also have been criticized for implying that students can be evaluated under one set of conditions, and that their performance under those conditions will be representative of their performance under all conditions.

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To ensure a match between instruction and assessment, tests should reflect the complexity and variety of factors that are likely to influence students' reading ability under "real" reading conditions. They should measure several related concepts in relation to each test passage.

In addition, tests should use language consistently with the way it is used in workbook activities, basal reader selections, and in informal assessments, such as postreading questions. For example, if a workbook activity is labeled "Determining What Is Important," then the test covering that material should not be called something else, such as "Getting the Point."

Finally, students should be adequately prepared for tests. This means they should have opportunity for review and practice in the skills and concepts to be tested

GUIDELINE 5. When evaluating the match between what is taught and what is tested in basal programs, look for
- tests that reflect the complexity of "real" reading situations
- consistency in the language used to discuss a concept or skill throughout all components of the reading program
- adequate instruction and preparation for testing.

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PART THREE
Teacher Assistance for Testing

The suggestions that follow are based on research and effective practice. They are intended to help teachers incorporate the information provided in this booklet into their total instructional program.

How can I make the best possible use of basal program tests?

- Make sure that your tests are tied to lesson objectives

- Use enough test items to ensure that students' performance will be measured adequately for each objective

- Choose considerate test passages

- Select the best format possible for measuring the instructional objective

- Give clear and precise directions to students for completing a test

- Communicate the purpose of a test to your students.

PART FOUR
Listing of Guidelines for Evaluating Tests in Basal Programs

GUIDELINE 1(a). When evaluating directions for teachers, look for information specifying

- when it is appropriate to administer the test
- whether directions to students should be given orally, in writing, or both
- the time limits
- the purpose of the test
- how the test results should be interpreted and used

GUIDELINE 1(b). When evaluating test directions for students, determine if they provide students with clear and concise information about

- the purpose of the test
- the basis for choosing responses
- how answers will be marked
- what to do about guessing answers
- where and how open-ended responses are to be written

GUIDELINE 2. As you evaluate test validity and reliability, look for

- instructional objectives that are tied to the abilities and content tested
- questions that are expressed in clear and unambiguous language
- the use of formats that discourage guessing
- questions and passages that avoid race and sex bias
- the use of a sufficient number of questions to measure performance on a representative sample of objectives

GUIDELINE 3. As you examine test passages for considerateness determine that they do not

- contain ideas that are too dense
- require readers to make a number of unvalidated assumptions
- use imitation genres
- use deceptively simple language but complex concepts

GUIDELINE 4. As you evaluate test question formats, determine if they

- are appropriate for the objective being measured
- are clearly stated
- have grammatically correct answer options that are free of extraneous clues

GUIDELINE 5. When evaluating the match between what is taught and what is tested in basal programs, look for

- tests that reflect the complexity of "real" reading situations
- consistency in the language used to discuss a concept or skill throughout all components of the reading program
- adequate instruction and preparation for testing.

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PART FIVE
Worksheets for Evaluating Tests in Basal Programs

Some of the most important characteristics of tests have been discussed in this booklet and are reiterated in the guidelines. The worksheets that accompany this booklet will assist you in applying these guidelines in your evaluation of the test components of basal reading programs.

Specific directions for using the worksheets precede each one. Additional information about worksheets also appears in the *Leader's Manual*.

Materials and Resources

You will need worksheets for every basal reading program test that you wish to evaluate. For example, if you plan to evaluate three end-of-unit tests at Grade 3 for a particular program, then you will need three sheets. If you plan to evaluate three end-of-unit tests for Grades 3 and 4, you will need six sheets, and so forth. Reproduce as many copies of the worksheets as you want. For each level of each program you plan to evaluate, you will also need

- Teachers' manuals
- Student textbooks
- Teachers' test manuals (which include reproductions of students' tests)
- Workbooks, skillsheets, and other consumable pages

Points to Keep in Mind

1   The worksheets are appropriate for evaluating the test components in reading programs for all grade levels

2.   As you analyze the tests that accompany different basal programs, you may find variability in the kind and number of test components. You should note such differences and evaluate them as your needs and interests dictate

3   Do not assume that you will always fill every column and box of the worksheet. Some parts of the worksheet may not apply to each level of the program you are evaluating. Therefore, empty spaces do not indicate that the program is deficient

4.   Complete the form labeled *General Information* so that you will have a record of what has been examined

Rating What You Have Evaluated

The subtotal scores at the end of each section of the worksheets are intended to provide information about the strengths and weaknesses of particular aspects of a test. For example, if the subtotal score for the section entitled *Test Passages* is 0 A's, 1 B, and 4 C's, then it is evident that this particular test is weak in the area of providing considerate reading passages. As you look at all of the subtotal scores for a test, you will receive a clear picture of its overall quality.

WORKSHEETS: GENERAL INFORMATION

Basal Program: _____

Test Title: _____

Grade Level of Test· _____   Alternate Forms Available?   Yes____   No____

What Validity and/or Reliability Information is Supplied by the Publisher?

_____

_____

Type of Record Keeping System Available:

_____

_____

Stated Mastery Level. _____

WORKSHEET 1: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINES 1(a) and 1(b): Teacher and Student Directions

Teacher Directions

1. Using the teacher's test manual, choose a subtest from one of the midlevel or end-of-unit tests.

2. Look in the front of the manual for test administration directions. You will find that some programs provide a general set of directions to be used with each subtest or test and some provide directions for each separate subtest or test

3   Proceed to the part of the worksheet labeled *Teacher Directions* and circle A, B, or C for each question

Student Directions

1   Usually the directions in the student test booklet are reproduced in the teacher's test manual. Occasionally, however, the directions in the student booklet are less comprehensive than those in the teacher's manual   Therefore, you should compare the two sets of directions for consistency

2   Proceed to the part of the worksheet labeled *Student Directions* and circle A, B, or C for each question

WORKSHEET 1

CODE:
A = Yes, it is explicitly stated
B = It is inferable from the manual
C = No, it is not stated or inferable

Teacher Directions

1. Does the manual say where in the   A   B   C
   instructional sequence the test should be
   administered (i.e., is it a pretest, posttest,
   diagnostic test)?

2. Does the manual specify the mode for delivering   A   B   C
   the instructions to the students?

3. Is the purpose of the test stated explicitly?   A   B   C

4. Are specific suggestions offered for   A   B   C
   interpreting the results?

5. Does the manual state how much time   A   B   C
   the test will take to administer?

6. Does the manual state how the test is   A   B   C
   designed to be administered (i.e.,
   individually, small group, etc.)?

                                    SUBTOTALS:
                                    A's____
                                    B's____
                                    C's____

Student Directions

1. Does the manual include provisions for   A   B   C
   communicating to students the purpose of the test?

2. Do the directions to students specify   A   B   C
   exactly how answers are to be marked?

3. Are students provided with a basis for   A   B   C
   choosing a response?

4. Do students know how much time they   A   B   C
   have to complete the test?

5. Are students told what to do with respect   A   B   C
   to guessing?

6. Are the directions expressed in clear and   A   B   C
   unambiguous language?

                                    SUBTOTALS:
                                    A's____
                                    B's____
                                    C's____

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WORKSHEET 2: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINE 2: Test Validity and Reliability

1. To complete this section, you will need to use both the test booklet and the program's teacher's manual.

2. In the teacher's manual, locate the instructional unit for which this test was designed.

GUIDELINE 3: Test Passages

1. Using either the teacher's test manual or students' test booklet, locate a reading passage.

2. Remember that explicit examples of the types of test passages queried in the section can be found in this booklet.

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WORKSHEET 2

CODE
A = Consistently
B = Sometimes
C = Not at all or inconsistently

Test Validity and Reliability

1. Can you identify the instructional objectives to which the test is supposed to be tied?   A   B   C

2. Are the test items expressed in clear and unambiguous language?   A   B   C

3. Are the items based on information for which the students have received instruction?   A   B   C

4. Are the items free of race and sex bias?   A   B   C

5. Are there an adequate number of items to test each skill (i.e., four or more)?   A   B   C

SUBTOTALS:
A's____
B's____
C's____

Test Passages

1. Are the passages limited to the expression of a few ideas?   A   B   C

2. Are the passages written in such a way as not to force unsupported assumptions?   A   B   C

3. Do the passages represent a true and identifiable genre?   A   B   C

4. Is the information contained in the passage consistent with students' prior knowledge and beliefs?   A   B   C

5. Do the passages avoid deceptively simple language?   A   B   C

SUBTOTALS:
A's____
B's____
C's____

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WORKSHEET 3: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINE 4: Test Question Formats

1. For **Question 1**, you will need both the teacher's manual and the test booklet. For the remaining questions in this section you will need a test booklet.

2. For **Question 1**, you need to find the instructional objective in the unit lesson for the skill being tested. Compare the objective to the test format. If the objective states that the student will write a paragraph, but the test format is multiple-choice, then no match exists.

3. In **Question 4**, specific determiners means "all," "none," "never," etc

GUIDELINE 5: The Match Between What Is Taught and What Is Tested

1. You will need the teacher's manual, supplementary materials, such as workbooks and skillsheets; and the teacher's test manual.

2. For **Question 1**, find the label for the skill in the test booklet and compare it with the labels used in the unit lesson and the students' workbooks. If there is complete agreement then circle A, if there is agreement between any two sources or if synonyms are used, circle B, if the skill is called by a variety of names, circle C

3   For **Question 2**, locate the instructional lesson for a particular skill in the unit Does the instructional sequence include definition of the skill, demonstration of how it is to be used, and guided practice in applying it? If the answer is yes, circle A, if some one of the components are missing, circle B; if two or more components are missing, circle C

4   For **Question 3**, it is preferable that longer passages be used to measure performance on related skills such as finding the main idea and identifying supporting details It may be the case that very short (two-sentence) passages are used for each item. If this is the case, then circle C; if longer passages are used sometimes to test several skills but sometimes for only one skill, circle B, if passages consistently address more than one skill, circle A

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WORKSHEET 3

CODE
A = Yes, Consistently
B = Sometimes
C = Not at all or inconsistently

Test Question Formats

1.	Are the item formats used the best for measuring the instructional objectives?	A	B	C
2.	Is at least one correct answer identified?	A	B	C
3.	For multiple-choice items, are foils parallel in grammatical construction and length?	A	B	C
4.	Are items free of reliance on specific determiners?	A	B	C
5.	Do the question stems contain complete questions?	A	B	C
6.	Are the questions passage dependent (i e., must the student read the passage in order to answer the question)?	A	B	C
7.	For comprehension subtests, are there questions at all levels of comprehension?	A	B	C

SUBTOTALS:
A's____
B's____
C's____

The Link Between What is Taught and What is Tested

1	Is the language used to talk about skills consistent across materials?	A	B	C
2.	Does the instruction adequately prepare students for being evaluated?	A	B	C
3.	Do the tests measure several related skills per passage?	A	B	C

SUBTOTALS:
A's____
B's____
C's____

PART SIX
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VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

**A Guide to Selecting
Basal Reading Programs**

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CONTENTS

PART ONE
Research and Practice

Research has established a strong link between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Students who do well on vocabulary tests also do well on reading comprehension tests; in fact, knowledge of word meanings is the single best predictor of reading achievement (5, 6, 25, 26). It is not surprising, therefore, that the development of students' vocabulary is of great concern to parents and teachers and that activities for promoting vocabulary growth play a prominent role in most basal reading programs. The purpose of this booklet is to help you better understand the process of vocabulary development so that you can make more knowledgeable judgments about the vocabulary instruction in basal programs.

Growth of Vocabulary Knowledge

The goal of vocabulary instruction is to increase students' knowledge of the meanings of words. But what does it mean to know the meaning of a word? Does it mean being able to give a dictionary definition of a previously unknown word? Does it mean being able to recognize the meaning of a word in the context of a specific sentence? Does it mean being able to use a word in a written or spoken sentence? Or does it mean having a fully developed concept, together with an understanding of how a word relates to other words and ideas?

Actually, knowing the meaning of a word can be any of these things. What might count as knowing a word depends on what sort of word it is and on what the word is going to be used for. Different words function differently in reading selections—in some cases, the understanding of a whole story depends crucially on the meaning of a single word, but stories usually also contain a number of words that could be skipped with no loss of comprehension. Being able to use a word appropriately in speech or writing often requires a greater depth of knowledge than that required to understand a selection containing the word. Furthermore, being able to use a word or to understand a selection containing it is not exactly the same thing as knowing the word's definition—most people know what the word *it* means and they can use it appropriately in a sentence, but few can produce a formal, or dictionary, definition for it. By the same token, knowing a definition does not guarantee that one will be able to use a word appropriately.

Levels of Word Knowledge

Knowing words is a matter of degree. For example, young readers might meet a word such as *diffident* in a reading selection and have no knowledge about its meaning. Or they might

realize that a *magnanimous* person is a good person, but not be able to distinguish *magnanimous* from other words with similar meanings, such as *friendly* or *nice*. They might know that a "stubborn mule" is an animal that will not move when told to, but they might not be able to apply the word *stubborn* to a door that won't open or to a child that won't eat broccoli

There are many words that people—at any age—know only partially, that they cannot adequately define or distinguish from other words similar in meaning. People also know far more about many words than what is put into their definitions. For example, most adult readers have extensive knowledge about a word such as *restaurant*. They can readily define it, perhaps as "a place where you go to eat," and use it correctly in speech and writing. They also have a whole repertoire of experiences with, feelings about, and knowledge of places called restaurants. This knowledge gives them insights about the appropriate dress and expected behavior for different kinds of restaurants, about the various roles of people who work in restaurants, and about the types of food available at different restaurants

For adults, knowledge about the word *restaurant* has expanded and increased with age and experience. Young children, however, do not have the benefits of age and experience, therefore, a child's concept of *restaurant* cannot be nearly as complete as an adult's. For example, young children might not differentiate a fancy restaurant from a fast food place or a cafeteria. They might not know the appropriate dress and expected behavior for different kinds of restaurants or that some restaurants have head waiters, coat clerks, and French chefs, or that some restaurants do not serve hot dogs and hamburgers

Word Knowledge and Reading Comprehension

What level of word knowledge is necessary for understanding a reading selection? That depends on the role a word plays in the selection. In some cases, superficial knowledge of a word is enough. But for important words in a selection, fairly extensive knowledge is often necessary. For example, students who have some knowledge of the different levels of meaning of *restaurant* can appreciate the humor in a story about two children who go to a fancy restaurant to eat their picnic lunch on a rainy day. For students who know nothing more than the dictionary definition of restaurant as "a public eating place," however, the story will produce comprehension problems, not humor

Research on vocabulary instruction indicates that extensive rather than limited word knowledge is sometimes needed to improve reading comprehension (2, 7, 12, 15, 23, 28). In studies where students were given wide and comprehensive vocabulary instruction, including information about related concepts and relationships among words, reading comprehension improved. By contrast, in studies where students were given only limited vocabulary instruction, such as synonyms and definitions, reading comprehension often did not improve (7, 8, 9, 15, 23, 27)

Extensive word knowledge is a component of something that teachers have known about for years—background knowledge. Some researchers believe that background knowledge is the most important determinant of a person's ability to comprehend a passage (18) Instruction that provides background knowledge or calls students' attention to background knowledge has been far more successful at increasing comprehension than instruction that focuses on vocabulary words alone

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Although reading comprehension is aided most by instruction that aims for a high level of word knowledge, instruction for limited word knowledge can also serve a useful function. In fact, most researchers who study the development of vocabulary agree that limited word knowledge can initiate learning that will later result in a deeper understanding of a word. Therefore, when planning vocabulary instruction, teachers need to keep in mind that the level of knowledge students should acquire for a given word depends on the role that word plays in the selection the students are reading and on how useful the word will be in their further reading.

It is also important for teachers to remember that students do not need to know every word in a story in order to read it with a high level of understanding. Researchers have found that replacing one content word in six with a difficult synonym did not significantly decrease sixth graders' comprehension of text; in other words, readers may be able to tolerate texts in which they do not fully know as many as 15% of the words (1, 16, 17). The same point is illustrated by students' ability to fill in correctly many of the blanks in cloze passages—sections of text in which every seventh (or fifth or tenth) word has been replaced by a blank. In fact, encountering unfamiliar words while reading is an important avenue of vocabulary growth.

In choosing selections for their students to read, teachers need to ensure that the selections are challenging and on the cutting edge of students' vocabulary abilities and yet not at such a high frustration level that students will give up trying to read them. Striking this balance is not easy, and the task is made more difficult by the fact that the balance is fluid and dynamic, changing as students mature as readers.

Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary knowledge is acquired gradually over a lifetime and in a variety of ways. Researchers believe that children add thousands of words to their vocabularies each year, and that they learn most of these words from context—by hearing words used by family members, friends, and teachers and by seeing them while reading—and not from formal instruction in word meanings (16).

This does not mean, however, that meeting words in context is a particularly efficient way for children to learn new vocabulary. As a matter of fact, students learn more about the words they are taught than about words they encounter casually in context (10). One study, for instance, showed that a reader has about a one-in-twenty chance of learning a word fully from encountering it once in a written context (16), while other studies showed that readers need to encounter a word in many different contexts before they learn it (3, 10, 13, 21). For students to attain extensive vocabulary knowledge, they must be exposed to a large volume of both written and oral language. However, when the goal of vocabulary instruction is to ensure that students learn specific words, formal instruction in word meanings is often necessary.

How much does the vocabulary instruction that takes place in school contribute to the development of students' vocabulary? Research comparing the effectiveness of different approaches to vocabulary instruction has not been conclusive; some researchers feel that explicit vocabulary instruction may account for only a small proportion of students' total vocabulary growth. As a matter of fact, some classroom observers have found that a surprisingly small amount of instruction is devoted specifically to the teaching of word

meanings (2, 11, 22). Yet most researchers and teachers agree that teaching the meanings of important words is an essential component of effective instruction in many subject areas. Some researchers also believe that good vocabulary instruction may create in students an interest in and an awareness of words that contribute to their vocabulary growth outside of formal instruction.

PART TWO

Discussion of Guidelines for Evaluating Vocabulary Instruction

Much of the vocabulary instruction that takes place in elementary schools is associated with reading instruction. The teachers' manuals that accompany basal reading programs usually direct teachers to present vocabulary activities before or after a reading selection, and student textbooks and workbooks generally provide vocabulary activities. The guidelines presented in this part of the booklet relate to the selection and sustained use of vocabulary words in basal reading programs and to the approaches to vocabulary instruction found in those programs.

Selection of Words

Research has not provided any simple formulas to determine which words should be taught. Objective measures such as the frequency with which a word appears in written English provide only limited help, not all rarely used words are hard, and not all frequently used words are easy. In addition, the difficulty of a word depends in part on the role it plays in a reading selection. Also, because classes and individual students vary widely in their vocabulary knowledge, the difficulty of a word also depends on the level of word knowledge of a class or an individual student.

Reading program publishers select the words used on their vocabulary instruction lists for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons may be more relevant to a particular class than others. For example, some words are included because they are important words appearing in the program for the first time, while other words are included because they may be difficult to pronounce. Still other words are selected because of their presence on well-known word frequency lists.

The question that teachers must ask as they examine the vocabulary lists in different programs is "Are the words on the lists reasonable choices for my students?" For no matter what words appear on the lists, teachers must always be sensitive to the special needs of their students and feel free to add words to or subtract them from the lists. Obviously if students in your class already know the meanings of some words, there is no point in wasting instructional time reteaching these words. Sometimes words should be left for the text to teach. For example, if the purpose of an expository selection is to explain how *bartering* works, students will have little reason to read the selection if bartering has already been thoroughly explained. Thus teachers' manuals should be careful to distinguish between words and concepts *needed to understand* a selection and those taught *through* the selection.

GUIDELINE 1. When evaluating the use of words in a reading program, look for vocabulary word lists that contain reasonable choices for the students using the program.

Sustained Use of Words

The number of encounters students have with unknown words in various contexts influences how quickly, how well, and how permanently they will learn the words (10, 14, 15) Whether they occur in prereading activities, as students read, or as part of workbook exercises, these encounters with words offer some initial opportunities for students to respond to the new words However, the sustained use of new words in subsequent stories and workbook tasks has an even greater impact on students' vocabulary learning.

Not every new word in a selection necessarily needs repeated practice. But particularly important words should be dealt with a number of times in a lesson or throughout the rest of the book

GUIDELINE 2. When evaluating the use of words in a reading program, look for the extent to which particularly important words are sustained within a lesson and across lessons

Approaches to Vocabulary Instruction

The guidelines in this section pertain to four approaches to vocabulary instruction typically found in basal reading programs: *definitional, contextual, conceptual,* and *mixed*

We discuss each of these four approaches separately because each has its own particular strengths, weaknesses, and pitfalls Some reading programs concentrate on a single approach, and can be evaluated in terms of how well they apply that particular approach However, there are some types of words for which each approach is best suited as an instructional method, as well as some types for which each is ineffective The best reading program, therefore, is not just one that uses a particular approach well, but one that uses the right approach for the right words

Definitional approach. In the definitional approach, students are presented with new words and then given, or asked to generate, definitions, synonyms, or descriptive phrases Sometimes they are asked to look up words in a dictionary or glossary The success of the definitional approach depends on several factors For example, providing students with a definition, synonym, or descriptive phrase for a new word can be appropriate and successful if the word represents an idea or a concept the students already know or if the word's idea or concept is easy to define In addition, the approach can be appropriate and successful when the definitions given are related to the selection students are reading and when they are expressed in words with which they are already familiar

For example, using a definitional approach to teach the word *diadem* will probably be successful because diadem is a new word for *crown*, a concept students already know *Veterinarian* is a concept that students might not know, but it is easy to define as a "doctor who takes care of animals"

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On the other hand, it probably would not be effective to introduce the word *figurative* through a dictionary definition such as "represented by a likeness or symbol." *Figurative* is likely to be a new concept that is difficult to define, even for intermediate-grade students.

Providing students with good definitions, synonyms, and descriptive phrases is one way teachers can get across some initial, but probably limited, word knowledge. As experienced teachers realize, students often need examples of words used in sentences, particularly if a word refers to something unusual or abstract. For instance, compare the following teacher's manual activities designed to present the word *expand* to fifth graders.

Example 1 (a)

> The teacher reads from the dictionary: *"expand*—to increase in bulk, but not in mass."

Example 1 (b)

> The teacher reads: *"expand*—to spread out, open up, make or grow larger, swell," and then says: "A balloon *expands* when it is blown up."

The problem with Example 1 (a) is that few fifth graders know the meanings of *bulk* and *mass*, and even fewer know the difference between the two words. On the other hand, they do know the meanings of *spread out* and *open up* used in Example 1 (b). Moreover, the use of a sentence context also helps explain the meaning of the word. Therefore, evaluators should note whether vocabulary activities provide meaningful sentence contexts in addition to good definitions.

Because research shows that active teaching—as compared to passive teaching in which students simply complete their assignments—is associated with successful achievement (18), you also need to look for specific suggestions to teachers about how to discuss definitions and examples with students. You should also look for suggestions for supplemental or alternative instructional methods for teaching difficult concepts or words not easily defined.

GUIDELINE 3 (a). When a reading program uses a *definitional* approach, look for

- definitions that relate to the selection
- definitions that use familiar words and concepts
- example sentences
- specific suggestions for discussing definitions
- suggestions for supplemental or alternative instruction for teaching difficult concepts or words that are not easily defined.

Additionally, you should examine reading program glossaries to see if they contain definitions that are accurate and appropriate to the selection students are reading. In one basal reader, for example, *tragic* is defined in the glossary as "very sad." The word tragic occurs in one of the reader's selections in the following context (spoken by a blind boy walking through

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Pompeii): "Too bad! The tragic poet is ill again. It must be a bad fever this time, for they're trying smoke fumes instead of medicine I'm glad I'm not a tragic poet."

You also should check glossary definitions for their appropriateness for the readers who will use the glossary. Here are some definitions taken from the glossary of one basal reader:

IMAGE: Likeness

BALEEN. Substance like horn that grows in plates in a whale's mouth and is
          used to filter food from the water

According to a survey of the frequency of words in printed-English school materials, *image*, the word defined, is about twelve times more frequent than *likeness*, the word used to define it (4). *Likeness* is also one of the few English words ending in -ness that is semantically irregular As for the definition of *baleen*, the words *horn* and *plates* may be familiar words, but they are being used with meanings that are probably not at all familiar to students

GUIDELINE 3 (b). As part of your examination of reading programs using the *definitional* approach, look for glossaries that contain accurate definitions that are appropriate for the readers who will use them

Contextual approach. Teaching new words in context is a time-honored approach to vocabulary instruction, and the contextual approach is commonly used in basal reading programs In this approach, students figure out the meanings of new words by reading the sentences in which words are found The contextual approach is similar to the definitional approach in that it most often leads to only limited word knowledge Words can be introduced in two types of contexts: instructional and natural

Instructional context In the instructional context, words are presented as part of specific vocabulary activities Most sentences found in the vocabulary activities of teachers' manuals, student textbooks, and workbooks are specifically written to help students figure out the meanings of new words The question that must be asked about any instructional context sentence is, "Does this sentence provide enough context clues for students to accurately figure out the meaning of the word?" For example, a teacher's manual directs the teacher to copy two sentences on the board

1   Passenger pigeons became *extinct* years ago when the last one died
2   Zelda was not very *patient* waiting for the train because she wanted to get home right away

The meaning of *extinct* can be derived relatively easily from the context of the first sentence In the second sentence, however, the correct meaning of *patient* could be inferred, but so could some incorrect meanings For example, other meanings such as *happy, pleasant, calm,* or *tolerant* fit this context as well as *patient* does

In the following examples, compare two teacher's manual activities designed to teach *mast* to third graders

Example 2 (a)

On the board the teacher writes: "Look up at the tall   ."

Example 2 (b)

On the board the teacher writes: "The tall   holds up the
sails on a sailboat," then draws a picture of a sailboat and labels the
mast and the sails.

The sentence in Example 2 (b) contains more context clues than does the sentence in Example 2
(a). In addition, the picture provides additional information to help students figure out what
mast means.

GUIDELINE 4 (a). When a reading program uses a *contextual* approach, look for instructional
contexts in which sentences provide enough context clues for students to accurately figure out
the meanings of the words

Natural context. Students learn many new words in the natural context of spoken
language, and they are expected to learn the meanings of many other new words from reading
selections in their textbooks Evaluators should remember, however, that sentences in
textbooks are intended primarily to communicate ideas, not to explain the meanings of new
words. So, these sentences often do not contain many context clues. Evaluators should not
assume that students will learn the meanings of all new words simply by reading a sentence or
even a paragraph.
Consider this sentence from a story in a basal textbook

Example 3 (a)

From upstairs we heard the front door open and then recognized the
buoyant footsteps of Uncle Ben

The problem here is that any number of possible meanings for *buoyant* including "lively,"
"heavy," "noisy," "familiar," and "dragging," could fit the context of this sentence

Of course, some sentences and paragraphs do provide content clues to convey the
meanings of new words

Example 3 (b)

When the cat pounced on the dog, the dog leapt up, yelping, and
knocked down a shelf of books The animals ran past Wendy, tripping
her She cried and fell to the floor As the noise and confusion
mounted, Mother hollered upstairs, "What's all that *commotion?*"

The meaning of *commotion* can be inferred from the description of the scene and by the
definitional phrase, "noise and confusion"

Yet, even when explicit context clues are provided, some students—particularly less able readers—may have great difficulty using these clues to infer the meanings of unknown words. Research has shown that efforts to teach students how to use context can be successful, but only to a limited degree (7, 13, 20, 21). This probably means that effective instruction in using context to learn new words needs to be explicit and frequent.

Teacher modeling of vocabulary learning is one explicit strategy for showing students how to use context. This strategy requires a teacher to read a sentence aloud and then show, through a think-aloud process, how context can help in figuring out the meaning of a word.

Example 4

The teacher reads the following sentence "The worried rider couldn't control the *tenacious* horse." She then says:

I'm going to look at the sentence for clues that will help me figure out the meaning of *tenacious*. Let's see, *tenacious* must mean something that a horse could be that would make it hard for its rider to control. Maybe *scared*, a horse could be scared, and because it was scared, it might act up. Or a horse could be stubborn, because horses sometimes do get stubborn, and when they do, it's hard for a rider to control them. Well, those are all the clues I can think of, and I still don't know what *tenacious* means. I'll read on.

This teacher makes her own thought processes explicit as she tries to discover the meaning of an unknown word through the context of the sentence. And even though she finds several context clues, she decides she needs more information before she can determine the word's meaning.

Students need to learn how to decide when adequate information about a word meaning is available in the context as well as when they can make a decision about meaning from the context. You need to check teachers' manuals to see if they provide specific guidance for teaching students how to learn from natural context. You also need to examine the instructions in student materials to discover if they inform students that natural contexts sometimes supply incomplete or even misleading clues about the meanings of words.

GUIDELINE 4 (b). When a reading program uses a *contextual* approach, look for

- natural contexts coupled with explicit directions for helping students use context to figure out unfamiliar word meanings
- directions in teachers' manuals that provide guidance for teaching students how to learn from natural context
- instructions telling students that natural contexts sometimes supply incomplete or misleading information about the meaning of a word

Conceptual approach. Some of the terms associated with the conceptual approach to instruction are "concept development," "elaboration method," "semantic features method," and "semantic mapping." No matter what the label, a conceptual approach is based on students learning to think about the concept that underlies the word. Conceptual approach vocabulary activities can employ many familiar elements of vocabulary instruction, including definition, word classification and etymology, context clues, analogy, and denotations and connotations of words.

Extensive word knowledge is the goal of the conceptual approach. In pursuing this goal, teachers must help students establish ties between new words and related words they already know. They can do this by pointing out the new words in reading selections and by encouraging students to use the new words in a variety of written and spoken sentence.

In addition to teaching new words, vocabulary instruction also must teach new concepts. Both definitional and contextual approaches are often inadequate when it comes to teaching truly novel concepts. For a student who doesn't know anything about caterpillars and how they turn into butterflies, a definition of *metamorphosis*, such as "a complete, often sudden or dramatic change in appearance, character, or form" is not going to be sufficient. Nor will an encounter with the word *metamorphosis* in context necessarily be helpful. If the student lacks the concept behind a word, this concept must be built up, with new information being tied in as much as possible with words, concepts, and experiences already familiar to the student.

Suppose a teacher is about to have his students read a selection about a couple who moved into a mansion, and he knows that the students' comprehension of the selection is dependent upon their deep, complex understanding of mansion, including its connotations, such as prestige, wealth, and influence. And suppose the teacher knows his students do not have such knowledge of *mansion* and that the selection does not provide sufficient information to help them understand what a mansion is. Here are some examples of activities the teacher can use to help his students develop the concept of a mansion.

Example 5

> After discussing the meaning of the new word *mansion*, the teacher
> builds ties between what the students know about houses and the new
> words by asking such questions as
>> Have you ever seen a very big house?
>> What does it look like?
>
> Then the teacher proceeds to describe how even a big house can be
> different from a mansion by introducing facts such as
>> a mansion is very large
>> costs a lot of money
>> is a home for rich people

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Example 6

The teacher uses examples and nonexamples of *mansion* to help students discriminate what the word means from what it does not mean
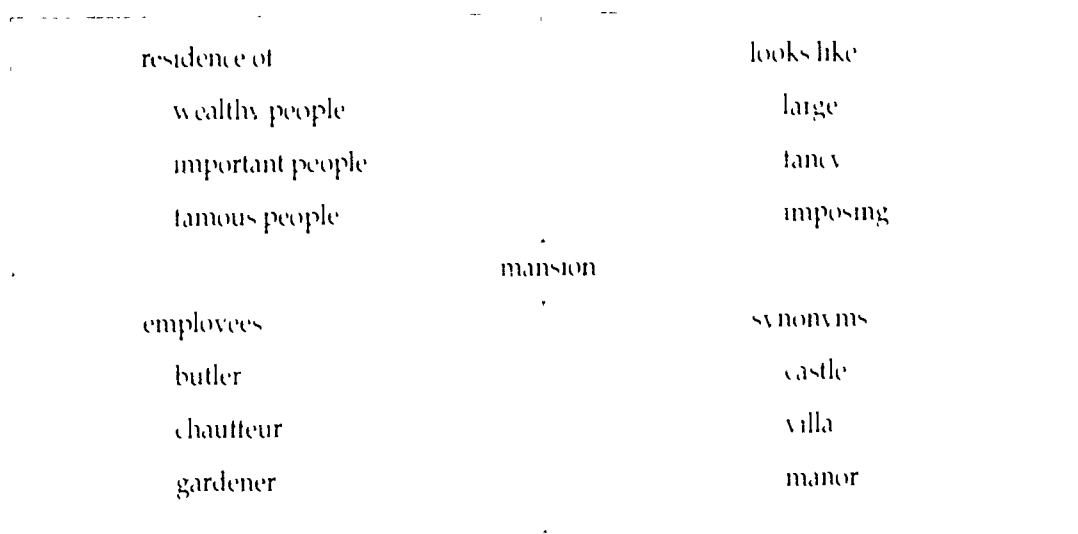
a *mansion* is
- a house for wealthy and important people
- a house that is very large
- a house that is stately and fancy

a *mansion* is not
- a house for storage
- a house that is small
- a house that is simple and plain

Example 7

The teacher and students create a semantic map

residence of	looks like
wealthy people	large
important people	fancy
famous people	imposing

mansion

employees	synonyms
butler	castle
chauffeur	villa
gardener	manor

Example 8

The teacher asks questions that will help students use the new word in a variety of contexts

What would you wear if you were invited to a mansion? Why?
How could you manage to purchase and live in a mansion?
What would your friends be like if you owned a mansion? Why?
Would you stop being friendly to people you know now?

Conceptual instruction can lead to the kind of extensive word knowledge that improves reading comprehension. And occasionally some type of conceptual instruction is necessary for students to understand a reading selection. For example, one second-grade reading selection focused on a new *plant* in town, but students were never instructed about the

meaning of *plant* as a factory. Without such conceptual vocabulary instruction on *plant*, it is likely that many second graders would have difficulty understanding the selection.

There is not always the need or the time, however, to teach all new words conceptually. Conceptual vocabulary instruction is time-consuming, especially when compared to definitional and contextual approaches. As mentioned above, a conceptual approach can be important for words crucial to the understanding of a selection. In addition, groups of related words, complex concepts, and especially concepts not part of students' everyday experiences are all particularly well-suited to the conceptual approach. Research demonstrating the effectiveness of the conceptual approach is fairly recent, therefore, this approach is not frequently found in reading programs.

GUIDELINE 5. When a reading program uses a *conceptual* approach, look for
- a focus on words that are crucial to an understanding of the selection
- the use of new words in a variety of sentences and selections
- instruction that establishes ties between new words and concepts, related words, and experiences already familiar to the students
- instruction that establishes meaningful use of new words

Mixed approach. The different approaches to vocabulary instruction are not mutually exclusive and should not be viewed as isolated techniques. Sometimes a mixed approach can result in effective instruction (11, 19, 24). When teachers present some example sentences along with a definition, they combine the definitional and contextual approaches.

Example 9

> To teach the word *expand*
> Students use a school dictionary to find one of the senses of
> *expand* as "to increase in one or more physical dimensions as
> length or volume."
> The teacher presents a simple sentence. The balloon
> *expanded* as she blew air into it."

It is the combination of definition and context that communicates the meaning effectively. The context alone--"The balloon _____ as she blew it up" could allow multiple interpretations: *grew larger, burst, stretched, became taut,* or *became more transparent*.

In addition, when teachers and students create a semantic features chart, they can use definitions and context as they discuss the words on the chart.

The mixed approach might at first appear to be similar to the conceptual approach, and in some ways it is. However there is an important difference. The ultimate goal of the conceptual approach is extensive word knowledge, while the goal of a mixed approach might be more limited word knowledge.

GUIDELINE 6. When a reading program uses a *mixed* approach, look for a combination of the qualities given in the guidelines from the definitional and contextual approaches.

PART THREE
Teacher Assistance for Vocabulary Instruction

The suggestions that follow are based on research and effective practice. They are intended to help teachers incorporate the information provided in this booklet into their total instructional program.

1 How can I make sure I'm teaching vocabulary effectively and efficiently?

- Focus on words that are important to understanding the selection. You don't have to cover all the potentially unfamiliar words.

- Use definitions with caution. Supplement definitions with example sentences, discussion, and other activities, especially when new or difficult concepts are involved.

- Make the classroom a vocabulary-rich environment: use and discuss new words.

2 How can I help students learn more words on their own?

- Encourage more reading, both in and out of the classroom.

- Read to your students (this is especially important for younger students who may not be able to read vocabulary-rich materials, but it should not be ruled out for older students either).

- Model, discuss, and practice figuring out the meanings of words from context.

- Employ a variety of vocabulary activities to develop an interest in words and their meanings.

- Teach students *how* to use dictionaries and other resources, but do not rely on having them copy or memorize definitions as a major means of learning new words.

- Tie in new words and concepts to other words and concepts that are familiar to your students.

PART FOUR
Listing of Guidelines for Evaluating Vocabulary Instruction

GUIDELINE 1. When evaluating the use of words in a reading program, look for vocabulary word lists that contain reasonable choices for the students using the program

GUIDELINE 2. When evaluating the use of words in a reading program look for the extent to which particularly important words are sustained within a lesson and across lessons

GUIDELINE 3 (a). When a reading program uses a *definitional* approach, look for
- definitions that relate to the selection
- definitions that use familiar words and concepts
- example sentences
- specific suggestions for discussing definitions
- suggestions for supplemental or alternative instruction for teaching difficult concepts or words that are not easily defined

GUIDELINE 3 (b). As part of your examination of reading programs using the *definitional* approach, look for glossaries that contain accurate definitions that are appropriate for the readers who will use them

GUIDELINE 4 (a). When a reading program uses a *contextual* approach, look for instructional contexts in which sentences provide enough clues for students to accurately figure out the meanings of words

GUIDELINE 4 (b). When a reading program uses a *contextual* approach, look for
- natural contexts coupled with explicit directions for helping students use context to figure out unfamiliar word meanings
- directions in teachers' manuals that provide guidance for teaching students how to learn from natural context
- instructions telling students that natural contexts sometimes supply incomplete or misleading information about the meaning of a word

GUIDELINE 5. When a reading program uses a *conceptual* approach, look for
- a focus on words that are crucial to an understanding of the selection
- the use of new words in a variety of sentences and selections
- instruction that establishes ties between new words and concepts, related words, and experiences already familiar to the students
- instruction that establishes meaningful use of new words.

GUIDELINE 6. When a reading program uses a *mixed* approach, look for a combination of the qualities given in the guidelines from the definitional and the contextual approaches.

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PART FIVE
Worksheets for Evaluating Vocabulary Instruction

Some important aspects of vocabulary instruction have been discussed in this booklet and are summarized in the guidelines. The worksheet that follows will help you use these guidelines to evaluate vocabulary instruction in reading programs.

Specific directions for using the worksheet are on the page preceding it. General directions and some additional information about worksheets also appear in the *Leader's Manual*.

Materials and Resources Needed

You will need a copy of the worksheet for every lesson you plan to evaluate. For example, if you plan to evaluate three lessons at one grade level, you will need three copies of the worksheet. If you plan to evaluate two grade levels, you will need six copies. Reproduce as many copies as you need. For each level of each program you plan to evaluate, you will also need

- Teachers' manuals
- Student textbooks
- Workbooks, skillsheets, and other consumable pages.

Points to Keep in Mind

1. The worksheet is most suitable for evaluating the vocabulary instruction in reading programs for grades three through eight.

2. As you analyze vocabulary instruction in reading programs, you may find additional vocabulary activities not discussed in this booklet. For example, you may find that the student textbook contains some vocabulary activities. You should note such additional activities, and evaluate them as your needs and interests dictate.

3. Do not assume you will always fill every column and box of the worksheet. Some parts of the vocabulary worksheet may not apply to each level of the programs you are evaluating. Empty spaces do not necessarily mean a program is deficient.

4. You may choose to use only parts of the worksheet.

Rating What You Have Evaluated

You may wish to develop a rating scale of your own to quantify your overall evaluation of vocabulary instruction in the basal reading programs you examine. We have included space on the worksheet for you to record these ratings.

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DIRECTIONS FOR WORKSHEET

GUIDELINES 1, 2: Selection and Sustained Use of Words

Target Lesson

1. Choose a selection from the student textbook. As you read the selection, list the words you think would be a problem for your students on the worksheet under the heading *Initial Reading*.

2. From the *Initial Reading* list, select those words crucial to an understanding of the selection. List these words under *Key Words*

3. Turn to the teacher's manual. Find the words identified for vocabulary instruction in that lesson Copy them under the heading, *Teacher's Manual Words*

4. Compare the words in the *Initial Reading*, *Key Words*, and *Teacher's Manual Words* lists. These lists will probably not be exactly the same, but there should be some overlap. Underline all the words that appear on more than one list. Copy these words under *Overlapping Words* Look for an overlap of words, especially between those words you identified as *Key Words* and the words identified as *Teacher's Manual Words*. Are the words listed under *Teacher's Manual Words* reasonable choices for your students? Write down your comments

5. Now turn to the workbook pages for the same selection. Check the list of words selected for instruction in the workbook. Comment on the consistency of words in the *Teacher's Manual Words* and the workbook. Are some words repeated? Write down your comments

Prior Lesson

6. Go back to the teacher's manual Look at the vocabulary words in the lesson prior to the selection you have just examined Write these words under *Prior Lesson*. Underline any words that occur in both lessons Write down any comments

Follow-up Lesson

7. Look at the vocabulary instruction in the lesson immediately following the selection you have examined Write these words under *Follow Up Lesson* Underline any words that occur in both lessons

GUIDELINES 3, 4, 5, 6: Approaches to Instruction

1. Use the same lesson examined for Guidelines 1 and 2

2. Determine which vocabulary activities in the teacher's manual develop word meanings. (You may wish to refer to the beginning of the teacher's manual to find out where vocabulary instruction can be found in the lessons)

3. List the words that are taught using the different approaches Also list words taught through other types of activities not mentioned in this booklet, as well as words that do not receive any specific instruction at all.

4. Read through each vocabulary activity and record your comments about the use of these approaches and these activities in the appropriate columns Please consult the listing of guidelines for specific things to look for

Worksheet   VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

Publisher _____ Grade Level _____ Program _____ Copyright _____ Evaluator _____

GUIDELINES 1, 2
SELECTION AND SUSTAINED USE OF WORDS

TARGET LESSON					PRIOR LESSON	FOLLOW-UP LESSON	Rating
Initial Reading	Key Words	Teacher's Manual Words	Overlapping Words	Workbook/Skill Sheets			
pp.		pp		pp			

GUIDELINES 3, 4, 5, 6
APPROACHES TO INSTRUCTION

Approach	Words Introduced	Comments on Teacher's Manual Activities	Comments on Workbook/Skill Sheets Activities	Rating
Definitional				
Contextual				
Conceptual				
Mixed				
Other activities				
No specific instruction				

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PART SIX
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WORKBOOKS

**A Guide to Selecting
Basal Reading Programs**

CONTENTS

PART ONE
Research and Practice

Students in many American schools spend a significant amount of time engaged in workbook activities. In fact, one researcher calculated that each elementary school student completes an average of 1,000 workbook pages a year for reading instruction alone (2). Not surprisingly, publishers of basal reading programs report a heavy demand from teachers and school districts for workbooks, and they have responded by developing and producing a multitude of workbook materials.

The purpose of this booklet is to review research about workbooks and to combine research findings with knowledge gained from classroom observation and from practice to provide you with information you can use in judging workbooks and workbook tasks in basal reading programs.

How Workbooks Are Used

In spite of the predominant role workbooks play in the classroom, research concerning workbook use is neither extensive nor conclusive. However, studies of instructional time allocation, seatwork, time-on-task, and other factors related to student learning and achievement have revealed some valuable information about workbook use. For example, a researcher examining time allocation in a large number of classrooms found that students spent up to 70% of their allocated instructional time doing seatwork, which frequently consisted of "written tasks done without direct teacher supervision" (1).

In another study of first- through sixth-grade classrooms, observers watched 90 reading periods in three school districts, each of which used a basal reading program (1). The organization of the classrooms varied; some of the teachers worked with small groups while others worked with an entire class. The observers recorded the type of different program components—teachers' manuals, student textbooks, and workbooks—that teachers used and the length of time they devoted to each component. They found that workbooks were a regular feature of reading periods in every classroom. Most students spent as much or more time working in their workbooks as they did working with their teachers or in reading their textbooks. The amount of time workbooks were used was *independent* of how the classroom was organized. This information gave rise to some questions about teachers' attitudes toward the importance of workbook activities.

In the self-contained classrooms, workbooks had an obvious management function; that is the teachers were able to teach small groups of students with undivided attention when the other students were doing something that engaged them. In cross-class groupings, the teachers organized their

reading periods to include time for students to work in workbooks and did so
even though there was no management need to provide something for
students to do independently . . . . It was evident that these teachers used
workbooks because they considered them an important component of the
reading program (12).

Workbooks and Student Learning

Is there a relationship between the use of workbooks and student learning? Studies
documenting time-on-task show that when students do independent, workbook-type activities
they typically spend less time-on-task than they do when working with their teachers in small
groups (6) However, this situation can be affected by the extent to which teachers hold
students accountable for seatwork Students who are held responsible for completing seatwork
are more likely to be attentive and to stay on task (7)

The existing research concerning the relationship between student performance on
standardized tests and the time they spend completing workbook-type activities shows that
students do better on standardized tests when they have spent time in school doing "test-like"
tasks (5). Publishers of workbooks seem to have acted on this information; anyone who has
spent time looking at workbook tasks can verify that a good number of them have a definite
similarity to the format and content of standardized tests.

A researcher who found that first graders in eight different classrooms spent from 30 to
60% of their allocated reading instruction time in some form of seatwork concluded that some
students did not appear to benefit from seatwork activities

There was a group of students whose responses to seatwork frequently were
not facilitative to learning . . they revealed a lack of understanding of the
content or skills in the seatwork and they used strategies that were not likely
to strengthen their understanding. In general, they did not seem to "make
sense" of their seatwork tasks in ways that might further their learning (2)

Another researcher expressed concern about the use of workbooks by students who
have difficulty learning to read (12) She noted that teachers often turn to supplementary
workbooks in order to provide extra instruction and practice for these students and
commented that "Even more pages of irrelevant and pointless tasks may have a particularly
adverse effect on children for whom learning to read is difficult " Studies done by one group of
researchers indicate that these students often develop strategies that allow them simply to
complete the work on the page, and that these strategies have little or no relationship to
mastery learning or to the content of the workbook task (3). These researchers contended that
the development of such strategies leads to an increase in student frustration and to their
additional low achievement

The Function of Workbooks

Why are workbooks used so extensively? Most likely because they serve genuine functions for
both teachers and students

How workbooks serve teachers. Teachers rely on workbooks as aids to classroom management and to instruction (3). Most teachers know, for example, that independent workbook time can reduce the noise and activity levels in the classroom and keep some students occupied so that others can be taught in small groups. In addition, workbooks can save teachers valuable time by providing readily evaluated practice materials to accompany basal reading programs.

Workbooks also give teachers immediate feedback about the daily performance of individual students on all parts of a task. Typically, a teacher working with a group of students will ask one student to read a passage or to answer some questions. If that student's response is acceptable, the teacher often assumes that the students who did not respond were also able to read the passage or answer the questions and moves to the next part of the lesson. In contrast, workbook activities require students to work independently. How a student performs in his or her workbook activities gives teachers information that will allow them to make decisions about whether that student needs additional instruction. One warning: *The value of independent workbook time holds true only if the workbook reflects important aspects of the reading program.*

How workbooks serve students. Well-developed workbooks containing well-constructed tasks can serve students in many ways. Primarily, they furnish students with practice in a variety of areas, including

> *Reading.* Some workbook tasks give students opportunities to apply the skills and concepts they have been taught in a reading lesson

> *Reviewing and synthesizing.* Some workbook tasks provide students with a review of what has been taught. Others require them to synthesize information and to apply what they have learned to new examples and situations

> *Writing.* Some workbook tasks require students to write sentences and paragraphs—activities that can be a bridge between reading and writing

> *Working independently.* Students do most workbook tasks without the help of a teacher. Such independent work experiences in the primary grades can prepare students for the learning and studying modes of the upper grades by helping them to develop time management, self-pacing, self-monitoring, and self-checking abilities

> *Following directions and taking tests.* Workbook tasks allow students to become familiar with a variety of directions and with different test formats

In addition, workbooks can provide students with a sense of accomplishment when the tasks require work that is "do-able," worthy, challenging, and has some pay-off

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Concerns about Workbooks

Although basal reading program workbooks serve many valid functions in the classroom, many educators have serious concerns about them. For example, some describe workbook activities as "busywork"—activities that do not really help students learn but do keep them occupied and looking as if they are learning. A researcher (11) who observed students completing workbook assignments in classrooms noted that when the students had mastered the content of a workbook task, they regarded further practice as trivial and usually boring. On the other hand, she found that when students didn't understand the content of a workbook task, their attempts to complete that task were counterproductive and frequently frustrating.

Another concern about workbooks is that students engaged in such seatwork activity often seem more interested in "getting done" than in understanding the purpose of the activity. This is amply illustrated in the following comments noted by a researcher (4) who observed and interviewed students as they completed workbook tasks

> "I'm almost done—just two more."
>
> "I'm almost done with a unit."
>
> "There! I didn't understand it, but I got it done."

"Getting done" is sometimes a result of knowing the numerous and varied styles or formats of workbook tasks. A casual observational study (11) of content area and reading workbooks tasks indicated that students are confronted with many different response formats, and that categories of these can have slight but confusing variations. An expert "workbooker" may then have the advantage over the novice simply by having a large repertoire of workbook task-response types.

Other educators are concerned that workbooks do not include tasks requiring extended reading and writing. They point out that typical workbook tasks usually consist of words, sentences, and short paragraphs that students read and respond to by filling in blanks, circling or underlining answers, or picking one answer from several choices.

Ardent critics of workbooks note the emerging research about the relationship between reading and writing and argue that the content and format of workbooks need serious reconsideration. As one curriculum director writes

> Students do not learn to write by doing X's and circles and they don't learn to
> read by doing workbook pages. I am hoping that when workbooks are
> produced with the next series of readers that there will be a great deal more
> integration of writing and reading. Examples could include open-ended
> sentences allowing students to respond and recommendations for more
> complete writing assignments. It is also my dream that publishers will find
> some way to ask questions about literature. I feel these questions could be
> posed dealing with plot, character, etc., so that students could be enticed to
> read a wide variety of literature (11)

Another concern is that the vocabulary in workbook tasks is frequently different from, and sometimes more difficult than, that in the rest of the basal reading program (12). When the readability of paragraphs in workbooks was compared with that of the student textbooks they accompanied, the readability level of the workbooks was found to be significantly higher (an average of more than one-and-a-half grade levels) than that of their companion basal readers

(9). If workbooks *are* more difficult to read than the basal readers they are designed to accompany, this difference in reading levels can present problems for students expected to complete workbook tasks independently.

Workbook directions also present problems for students. For example, directions are not always designed to match the competency level of the students, some contain too many difficult words and too many procedural steps (8).

The content and design of workbook tasks raise other concerns. Because of the small number of studies relating to workbook content and design, publishers have a limited body of research-based information to draw upon as they plan the content of workbooks, sequence the content, design the tasks, and write the directions. One examiner of workbooks wrote.

> I surveyed a number of basal program workbooks. As I did this, I also
> followed along in the teachers' guides to see what was going on in the rest of
> the unit or lesson. Some of what I saw seemed inefficient, some insufficient,
> some seemed needlessly labored, some seemed impossibly difficult, some
> seemed irrelevant to the instructional plan of the program, a few seemed
> simple-minded—and some seemed clever, fine, and well done (11)

A researcher concerned about the content and design of workbook tasks observed that writers of workbooks often develop exercises students like and can complete successfully, yet don't have to read. She observed that some features of workbook tasks permit students to skip the parts they are supposed to be understanding and instead respond to pictures, task formats, highlighting, and grammatical cues (13)

PART TWO
Discussion of Guidelines for Evaluating Workbook Tasks

Because so few researchers have studied workbooks, it is difficult to provide a research-based set of guidelines for use in the adoption process. Therefore, the guidelines presented in this part of the booklet were developed by combining implications from the available research with information based on classroom observations and with conclusions derived from the examination of many workbooks. The guidelines focus on the following: the content of workbook tasks, the design of workbook tasks, practice and review tasks, the instructional language of tasks, reading and writing responses to tasks, task considerateness, and the art and page layout of tasks.

A *special note*. In the following sections, we use the word task to describe a set of related items, usually found on one workbook page.

Content of Workbook Tasks

Integration and importance To provide worthwhile practice, workbook tasks should be an integral part of the reading lesson and should reflect the most important aspects of the lesson. For example, if the teacher's manual directs the teacher to present a lesson on the sequencing of events or ideas within a story, one or more of the workbook tasks in that lesson should provide practice in sequencing ideas or events. And in subsequent lessons, tasks of the same type should be repeated occasionally

Reading selections. Since students spend part of a reading period reading a story or an informational selection in their textbook, it makes sense that workbook tasks should be based on their reading. Workbook questions about the important features of stories in the textbooks—plot, setting, characterization—or about the important content in informational selections are more valuable than a continuous diet of questions about short paragraphs unrelated to the rest of the lesson

Workbook appropriate. While integration of the workbook with the program is always important, evaluators should also keep in mind the appropriateness of the task Some instruction does not readily lend itself to workbook practice For example, if listening to the sounds of words is part of the lesson, the decision *not* to provide a written workbook practice task for an auditory discrimination activity makes sense

Vocabulary Research in vocabulary acquisition points out that students need to read and write new words many times before they "own" them (10) The vocabulary in workbook tasks should relate to the vocabulary used in the rest of the program Thus, if a workbook task directs students to underline words in passages that show feelings of *hostility, mystery, bewilderment*, and *hilarity*, these concepts should have appeared in a current or previous lesson

Erratic complexity. The complexity and difficulty of workbook tasks should increase as grade levels increase. For example, tasks at the sixth-grade level should be more complex and difficult than those at he fourth-grade level. In addition, all workbook tasks within the same grade level should have similar levels of complexity instead of, for example, a difficult page on comprehension followed by a simple page of word-attack skills.

GUIDELINE 1 When analyzing the *content of workbook tasks*, look for tasks that
- are integrated with the lessons in the teacher's manual and with the student textbook
- relate to the most important (and workbook-appropriate) instruction in the lessons
- are based on the reading selections
- use vocabulary that is from current or previous lessons
- increase in difficulty as grade level increases.

Task Design

So little has been written about the instructional design of workbook tasks that we must again resort to common sense. In general, a well-designed task allows the student to concentrate on its important elements and to move easily from beginning to end When a task is completed, the student's performance should be evident to the teacher The examples below illustrate some specific aspects of the design of workbook tasks

Reading all choices Tasks should be written so that students need to read all possible responses before selecting the correct answer. The following item (12) is supposed to give students practice in reading two sentences that use different meanings for the same word The students are told to put a circle around the sentence that is illustrated by the picture.

Example 1 (a)
    1. Flowers grow in the earth.
    2   The earth moves around the sun.

The students have to read only as far as *flowers* in the first sentence to find the correct answer. The task is written so that no further reading is necessary, which means it is unlikely students will receive practice in reading *earth*, the word that is the focus of the exercise, in two different contexts.

Consider an item (12) that is similar, but written so that students are much more likely to read all of the words.

Example 1 (b)
    1   I wish her dog didn't *shed*
    2. Her dog sleeps in that *shed*

Student responses Tasks should be written so that student responses indicate what students know For example, the response to the following fact and opinion task indicates that

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the student knows there is one opinion sentence. However, it does not indicate whether he or she knows *which* is the sentence expressing an opinion.

Example 2 (a)

Instructions: Give 1 point for each sentence that states an opinion. Write the number of points in the box.

Item 1: It says on the carton that this yogurt is made with fresh strawberries. Strawberry is the best flavor there is! $\boxed{1}$

Item 2: The book I'm reading is about cats. My cat is the best pet ever. She's the prettiest too. $\boxed{2}$

A better task requires students not to give points, but to underline the sentence that expresses an opinion.

Example 2 (b)

Instructions: Underline the sentence that states an opinion.

Item 1. It says on the carton that this yogurt is made with fresh strawberries. <u>Strawberry is the best flavor there is!</u>

In the following example (12), the teacher has no way of telling if the student has identified the *before* or *after* events, because the lines drawn by the student only indicate that two events have been matched

Example 3

Draw lines from the sentences that show *before* to those that show *after*

The boy fell in the street. ⟍ ⟋ Mail fell into the mailbox

The mailbox was full ⟋ ⟍ The boy hurt his arm.

The water spilled from the pail. ———— The woman filled the pail.

If students drew lines and then numbered the sentences, the teacher could judge the accuracy of their responses.

Multiple procedural steps. Two-part tasks in which success in completing the second part depends on doing the first part correctly are often instructionally weak and are always unfair to students. Consider a task in which students must first identify words that rhyme with *ring* from a list of words, and then use the words they have identified in complete sentences Only by selecting the correct words in the first part of the task will students be able to do the second part correctly.

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GUIDELINE 2. When analyzing *instructional task design*, look for tasks in which
- students must read all of the possible choices before selecting an answer
- student responses can be judged correct or incorrect
- student responses indicate to the teacher what the student knows
- students can successfully complete part two of the task without successfully completing part one

Practice and Review Tasks

Sufficient practice. Workbooks should contain enough practice with important concepts for students to benefit from the practice and not simply be "exposed" to concepts. Enrichment tasks that contain difficult (and often important) concepts frequently appear only once. For example, a workbook that has only one page on which students complete analogies is not likely to benefit students who need repeated opportunities for practice with such an important language concept.

Independent practice Workbooks should be designed so that, over time, students engaged in workbook activities will have the opportunity to develop independent learning strategies, such as self-pacing, using time properly, and checking and revising their completed work.

Extra practice Workbooks should contain supplementary tasks for students who need extra practice. Most basal programs provide supplementary workbooks. The tasks in these books should be integral to instruction, not busywork activities. Cutting, pasting, puzzles, games, and coloring tasks can keep students busy for a long time, but they cannot be expected to provide much practice in reading.

Systematic review. Workbooks should provide a systematic review of what is being taught in the program. Such a review can combine previously taught concepts, such as finding the main ideas and the supporting details of several paragraphs.

GUIDELINE 3 When analyzing *practice* and *review tasks*, look for tasks that provide
- sufficient practice
- independent practice
- extra practice
- systematic review

Instructional Language

Consistency The instructional language used in workbook tasks should be consistent with the language used in the teachers' manuals. Consistency of language should also be maintained from task to task within a workbook and certainly within single tasks. For example, if a teacher's manual directs the teacher to describe the differences between *fact* and *fiction*, but the students must decide if paragraphs they read in their workbooks are *real* or *not real*, there is an inconsistency in what the students hear from their teachers and read in their workbooks.

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Explanations of purpose. When appropriate, workbook tasks should be accompanied by brief explanations of purpose or by explanatory titles that students and teachers are likely to understand. The titles in Example 4, which were selected from several workbooks (12), probably would not communicate to students the point of the task. (More explanatory titles are in parentheses.)

Example 4

The Boy Roy	(Practice with /oɪ/)
Putting Down Roots	(Root words)
That's Not a Ship	(Using /sh/ and /th/)

Clear and easy-to-follow instructions. Instructions should be clear and easy to follow; brevity is a virtue. Experienced teachers realize that many students do not read instructions before starting to work. When easy-to-teach students decide they need to read instructions—even if the instructions are unclear—they usually are able to follow them. However, when hard-to-teach students are confronted with unclear instructions, their inability to follow them compounds the problem of performing the tasks. Clear instructions are especially important for such students.

Instructions can become simpler as they are used repeatedly. For example, an initial instruction for a workbook task could read: "Read the sentence and the words below it. Decide which word will best complete the sentence. Write the word on the line." Subsequent appearances of this type of task could have a much shorter instruction: "Complete each sentence."

As they assess the instructions on workbook pages, evaluators should pay close attention to consistency of language, sentence length, and number of directional steps. The complexity of instructions should match students' levels of competency.

GUIDELINE 4 When analyzing *instructional language*, look for tasks that
- use language consistent with the rest of the program
- are accompanied by brief explanations of purpose or explanatory titles that students understand
- have clear and easy-to-follow instructions, with attention to consistency, sentence length, and directional steps

In addition to the components we have discussed, there are a number of other aspects of instructional language used in workbooks that require evaluators' attention (12). These are detailed below.

Ambiguity. For example, unclear uses of such words as "first," "second," "last," "over," "under," "before," and "after" are common. Young children are likely to have trouble with these concepts.

Excessive wordiness. For example, "Use the sounds letters stand for and the sense of the other words to find out what the new word in heavy black print is." Young children are not likely to understand these directions.

Embedded steps. For example, "Read the first sentence and fill in the missing word. Read the second sentence. Find the word from the first sentence that makes sense in the second sentence and print it where it belongs. Then, do what the last sentence says. Repeat for all the other sentences." This instruction has too many steps.

Lost steps. For example, "Fill in the blanks at the bottom of the page." This instruction appears at the top of a page and is the last of several different instructions. Students are likely to forget it by the time they get to the bottom of the page.

Confusion. For example, "Four things are named in each row. Three of the things named are part of the other thing. Put a ring around the thing that the others are part of in each row." These awkward instructions make a simple task difficult.

Negation. For example, "Circle the word in each row that does not have a long vowel sound" is more difficult to understand than "Circle the word in each row that has a short vowel sound."

Insufficient information. For example, "Underline the word with the same sound as the word that names the picture." Because the words represented by a picture may each contain several sounds, this instruction does *not* contain enough information to permit the students to complete the task.

Evaluators might consider developing additional guidelines to cover these aspects of the instructional language used in workbook tasks.

Reading and Writing Responses

Typically, workbook tasks involve filling in blanks with words, circling or underlining items, or selecting one of several choices. A typical workbook task requires a student to choose the main idea sentence of a paragraph from three sentences in a multiple choice item and underline it. Requiring students to *write* main ideas in their own words is closer to the challenges of real studying. Similarly, asking students to write the sequences of ideas in a paragraph is much better preparation for reading and studying than having them write numbers next to an array of phrases or sentences to show order. Students' responses in workbook tasks should be as much like "real" reading and writing as possible.

Application tasks. Workbooks should provide some pages that challenge students to apply several comprehension or decoding strategies to the same task. Tasks like these seem

closer to the real challenges of reading and studying. Such a task would, for example, require students to read a paragraph, find the main ideas, the important details, the sequence of events, and review some vocabulary. A decoding practice page would require students to use several decoding strategies.

GUIDELINE 5 When evaluating *reading* and *writing responses*, look for tasks that

- provide opportunities for students to respond in their own words
- provide opportunities for students to apply several comprehension strategies or decoding skills in one task

Considerateness to Students

A selection in the student textbook that is "considerate" to students is well-written, well-organized, and easy to understand. Workbooks should also be considerate to students. Some features of workbooks that might help many students include:

Repeated use of task formats. Workbooks should contain a limited number of task formats. Formats are *not* commonly repeated in workbooks, on the contrary, there are usually as many task formats as pages in a workbook. The repeated use of task formats, but with different content, has two advantages: it reduces the need for teacher help and it allows students, once they have learned a format, to concentrate on the task's content.

Consistent responses The way students respond should be consistent from task to task. For example, students are likely to be confused if they are directed in one task to use x to mark words used *incorrectly* in sentences and are directed to use x to mark words that indicate the *correct* details from a story in the very next task.

Tasks that are fun. Some workbook tasks should be fun and have an obvious payoff for students. Certainly students do not expect all tasks to be game-like, but they appreciate an occasional puzzle, word game, cartoon, or other entertaining task.

Nonfunctional tasks. While one person's "fun" task may be another's "nonfunctional" task, workbooks with large numbers of tasks that do nothing but take up space and student time should make teachers uneasy. The proportion of nonfunctional tasks in a workbook easily can be calculated by counting. Even though the success of this effort will depend upon the agreement (or near agreement) of the people evaluating the workbooks about what is nonfunctional, such an effort is worth pursuing. If more than a few workbook tasks are judged nonfunctional, the practice value of that workbook will have to be questioned, especially if it is for use with hard-to-teach students.

**GUIDELINE 6.** When evaluating *considerateness to students*, look for

- repeated use of task formats
- consistent responses
- occasional tasks that are fun
- few or no nonfunctional tasks

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Art and Page Layout

Appropriate art Pictures must be appropriate to the task. Sometimes pictures are extraneous to the content of a workbook page and seem to exist solely as a decorative occupier of space. Inappropriate and confusing art, no matter how nice it looks, can turn a task into a guessing game. The following auditory discrimination task (12) is from the beginning level of a program:

Example 5

Circle the pictures whose names begin with the beginning sound in the word *cat*
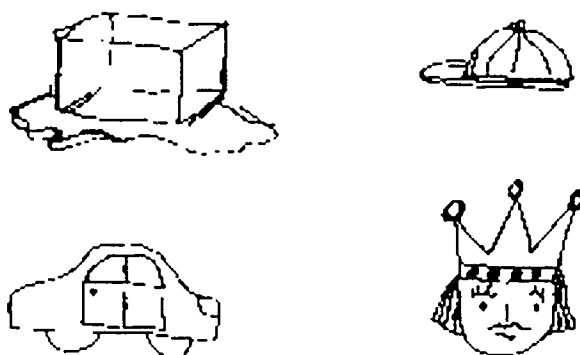
The problem with this artwork is that the cube of ice could be identified as *ice*, instead of *cube*, the car could be identified as an *automobile*, the cap as a *hat*, and the crown as a *king* Art work must be clear and unambiguous.

Page layout. Page layout should help students understand the requirements of the task. In the example below (12), the requirements of Task A may be obscure to some students, whereas in Task B each part is labeled, making the task clearer

Example 6

Task A

Draw a line between the syllables of each word. Then write the number of the rule you used

Rules
1   between double consonant letters
2   between unlike consonant letters
3   between a vowel letter and a consonant
4   between two vowel letters

scaling	duty	letter
b?**le	potato	person
butter	explain	jelly

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Task B

Draw a line between the syllables of each word. Then write the number of the rule you used.

Rules

1. between double consonant letters
2. between unlike consonant letters
3. between a vowel letter and a consonant
4. between two vowel letters

Words	Rule Number	Words	Rule Number	Words	Rule Number
scaling		duty		letter	
battle		potato		person	
butter		explain		jelly	

GUIDELINE 7 When examining the *art* and *layout* design of workbooks, look for

- pictures that are appropriate to the task
- page layouts that help students understand the requirements of the task

PART THREE
Teacher Assistance for Workbook Tasks

The suggestions that follow are based on research and effective practice. They are intended to help teachers incorporate the information provided in this booklet into their total instructional program

1   How can I help students understand the directions and purpose of workbook tasks?

- Establish the purpose for each workbook task

- Go over what is expected—by reading or paraphrasing directions

- Sometimes lead students through new or complex tasks before they leave the reading group

- Limit the number of workbook tasks assigned at one time and provide assistance to students who may have difficulty recalling what is expected of them as they work on a number of tasks.

- Emphasize the content-related purpose of a workbook task instead of just "getting it done"

2   How can I make workbook time more valuable for students?

- Review assigned workbook tasks to see which are valuable instructional tools. Students do not need to complete all the workbook tasks in a book

- Establish procedures for students seeking help while you are working with another student or group of students

- Devote more attention and time early in the year to guiding students as they complete workbook activities, gradually increase their independent work time

- Circulate among the students to help them as they begin work

- As you circulate, watch for a pattern of errors or misunderstandings. If a pattern emerges, explain the task again, modify the task, or give an alternative assignment

- As you circulate, ask individual students to explain how they arrived at an answer This helps students become more reflective about the steps they go through and provides you with additional information about your students.

- Spend time reviewing completed assignments and talking with students who need personalized feedback.

- Allow time for students to engage in independent reading

3. How can I help students become independent workers?

- Devote attention and time to an independent work training session Explicitly present strategies and skills involved in
      using resources
      checking completed answers
      revision strategies
      pacing and time management
      self-monitoring
      signals to seek help (a getting-help system)

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PART FOUR
Listing of Guidelines for Evaluating Workbook Tasks

GUIDELINE 1. When analyzing the *content of workbook tasks*, look for tasks that
* are integrated with the lessons in the teacher's manual and with the student textbook
* relate to the most important (and workbook-appropriate) instruction in the lessons
* are based on the reading selections
* use vocabulary that is from current or previous lessons
* increase in difficulty as grade level increases

GUIDELINE 2. When analyzing *instructional task design*, look for tasks in which
* students must read all of the possible choices before selecting an answer
* student responses can be judged correct or incorrect
* student responses indicate to the teacher what the student knows
* students can successfully complete part two of the task without successfully completing part one.

GUIDELINE 3 When analyzing *practice* and *review tasks*, look for tasks that provide
* sufficient practice
* independent practice
* extra practice
* systematic review

GUIDELINE 4 When analyzing *instructional language*, look for tasks that
* use language consistent with the rest of the program
* are accompanied by brief explanations of purpose or explanatory titles that students understand
* have clear and easy-to-follow instructions, with attention to consistency, sentence length, and directional steps

GUIDELINE 5 When evaluating *reading* and *writing responses*, look for tasks that
* provide opportunities for students to respond in their own words
* provide opportunities for students to apply several comprehension strategies or decoding skills in one task.

GUIDELINE 6. When evaluating *considerateness to students,* look for
- repeated use of task formats
- consistent responses
- occasional tasks that are fun
- few or no nonfunctional tasks.

GUIDELINE 7. When examining the *art* and *layout* design of workbooks, look for
- pictures that are appropriate to the task
- page layouts that help students understand the requirements of the task.

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PART FIVE
Worksheets for Evaluating Workbook Tasks

Some important aspects of workbook instruction have been discussed in this booklet and are summarized in the guidelines. The worksheets that follow will help you use the guidelines to evaluate workbook tasks in basal reading programs.

Specific directions for using the worksheets precede each one. Additional information about worksheets also appears in the *Leader's Manual*.

Materials and Resources Needed

You will need one copy of each worksheet for every reading program you plan to evaluate. Reproduce as many copies as you need. For each level of each program you plan to evaluate, you will *also* need

- Teachers' manuals
- Workbooks, skillsheets, and other consumable pages

Points to Keep in Mind

1. Because of the amount of time and work involved in applying the workbook guidelines, we suggest you select only three or four to use as you evaluate workbooks. Select those guidelines most important to your committee.

2. The worksheets are most suitable for evaluating workbooks in basal reading programs for grades two through eight.

3. Do not assume you will always fill every column and box of the worksheets. Some parts of the worksheets may not apply to each level of the programs you are evaluating. Empty spaces do not necessarily mean a program is deficient.

Rating What You Have Evaluated

You may wish to develop a rating scale to quantify your overall evaluation of workbook tasks in the basal reading programs you examine. We have included space on the worksheet for you to record these ratings.

WORKSHEET 1: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINES 4, 7. Instructional Language, Art and Layout

1. Choose one grade level and randomly select three tasks in a workbook that accompanies that level.

2. Write down the page number for each task you have selected

3   Read through each task and then record your comments

GUIDELINES 2, 5· Task Design, Reading and Writing Responses

1. Examine the same three tasks and record your comments.

GUIDELINE 2. Task Design (Continued)

1   In the workbook you are examining, look for tasks with multiple procedure steps Select three of them. Write down the page numbers for each task you have selected. Then decide if students can successfully complete part two of the task without successfully completing part one.

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Worksheet 1   **WORKBOOKS**

Publisher_____ Grade Level _____ Program _____ Copyright _____ Evaluator _____

GUIDELINES 4, 7 INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE, ART AND LAYOUT	Task 1 p. ___ Comments:	Task 2 p. ___ Comments.	Task 3 p. ___ Comments:	Rating:
Consistency of language				
Explanation of purpose				
Clear instructions				
Appropriate pictures				
Helpful layout				
GUIDELINES 2, 5 TASK DESIGN, READING AND WRITING RESPONSES	Task 1 p ___ Comments.	Task 2 p. ___ Comments	Task 3 p ___ Comments	Rating·
All possible choices				
Student responses				
indication of student knowledge				
Reading and writing responses				
Apply several strategies or skills				
GUIDELINE 2 TASK DESIGN	p . YES/NO	p ___ YES/NO	p. YES/NO	Rating.
Two-part tasks				

WORKSHEET 2: DIRECTIONS

GUIDELINE 1: Content of Workbook Tasks

1. Find the reading lesson in the teacher's manual that correspond with the three workbook pages you examined for the first worksheet.

2. Write down the page numbers for these lessons and for the workbook tasks.

3. Read through each workbook task and record your comments.

GUIDELINE 3: Practice and Review

1. Look at the table of contents or index in the workbook From these listings select two important skills or concepts. Write their names on the worksheets. In addition, write down *every* page number on which the skills or concepts appear

2. For each skill or concept you have selected, read through each of the pages you have identified. Record your comments.

GUIDELINE 6: Considerateness to Students

1. Select any 25 continuous pages from the workbook you are examining.

2. Read through these pages and record your comments

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Publisher_____ _____   Grade Level _____   Program _____   Copyright _____   Evaluator _____

GUIDELINE 1 CONTENT OF TASKS	pp. __ Comments:	pp. __ Comments:	pp. __ Comments:	Rating:
Integration				
Importance				
Reading selections				
Vocabulary				

GUIDELINE 3 PRACTICE AND REVIEW	pp __ Skill or Concept _____	pp __ Skill or Concept: _____	Rating
Sufficient practice			
Independent practice			
Extra practice			
Review			

GUIDELINE 6 CONSIDERATENESS TO STUDENTS	pp __ Comments	Rating:
Format, response forms, fun, and few or no non-functional tasks		

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PART SIX

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