

# How pupils learn to read

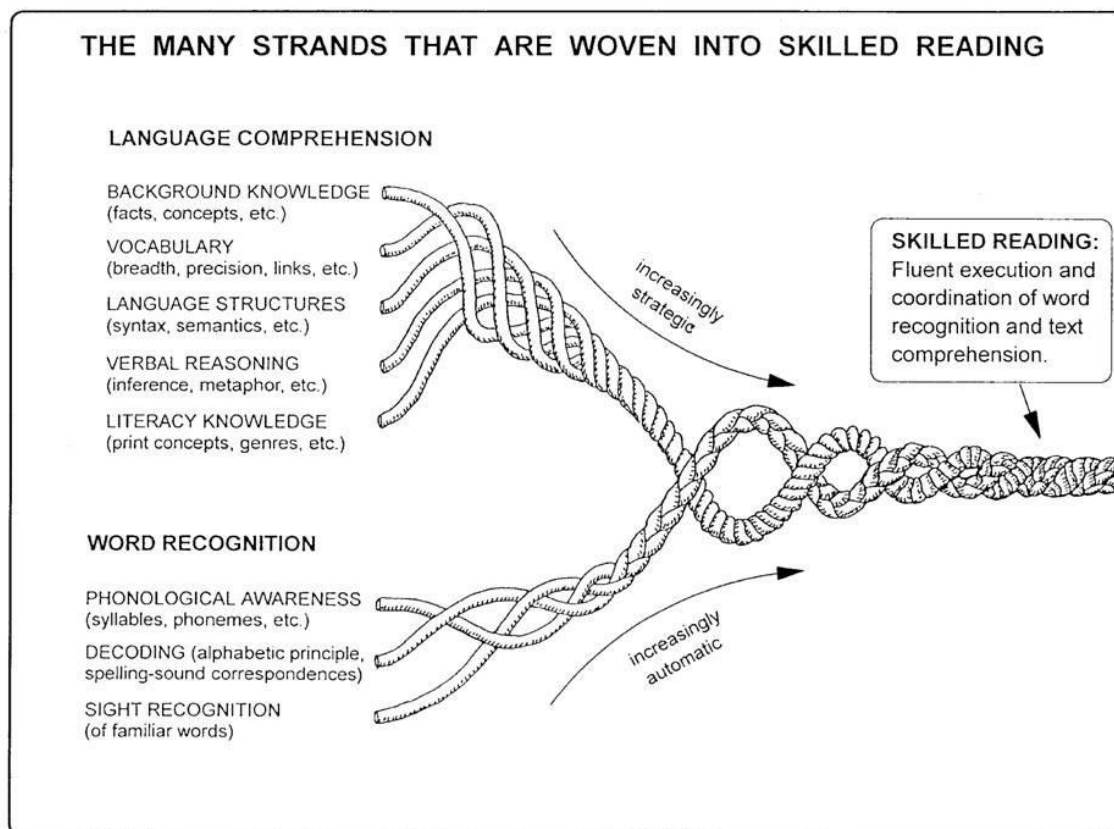
By Ruth Everett

Learning to read is a complex process, which draws on multiple knowledge sources and skills. This makes the process of reading development quite challenging to understand. Therefore, The Simple View of Reading is a great place to start as it highlights two connected but separable strands: word recognition and language comprehension.

So, what does word recognition and language comprehension entail?

Simply put, word recognition is the ability to *read* individual words whereas language comprehension is a process used to identify the *meaning* of written or spoken language.

But in order to understand these two strands in a bit more detail, it is helpful to look at The Scarborough Reading Rope.



This diagram is useful to highlight the complex processes involved in both word recognition and language comprehension.

Word recognition is comprised of three main elements. When reading, pupils will use sight recognition to read familiar words, which means they can read the word just by looking at it. However, when they come across unfamiliar words, they will need to decode them, which means breaking a word down into its sounds – also known as phonemes. In order to be able to do this,

pupils need to have phonological awareness, which is why early reading is taught through phonics. A pupil with poor word recognition may struggle to sound out complex vocabulary.

Language comprehension involves the integration of multiple sources of knowledge and skills. In order to comprehend a text, pupils need to have literacy knowledge, such as knowing to read text from left to right. They also need to understand the meaning of the vocabulary they read, and the syntax so they can make sense of words and sentences. Background knowledge of a topic is also important as this enables the reader or listener to apply reason and make inferences. All these components weave together to comprise effective language comprehension. A pupil with poor language comprehension may struggle to understand what a task is asking them to do or misinterpret key points in a text.

How can you develop pupils reading?

The Simple View of Reading highlights the need for a balanced approach to support pupils to become fluent readers. Both word recognition and language comprehension need to be addressed. When supporting pupils to read, it is important that you are aware of the individual reading challenges your pupils face and what their next steps are to improve.

This is particularly important for pupils who are struggling with reading as they need support and good teaching in order to progress, build confidence, and hopefully catch up with their peers. The Simple View of Reading can support you in targeting pupils who require additional support. By assessing both word reading *and* comprehension, you can identify which components need targeted development.