

What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

Teaching Reading is destined to become “stock-in-trade” for teachers in preparation and practicing teachers who want an updated, easy-to-read, and practical guide for assessing and teaching reading. The modules are predictably organized with practical classroom applications aplenty! The style and tone are accessible for classroom practitioners while communicating the best and most applicable current research evidence available. This new playbook is just the right mix of tactics, strategy, and content to deliver a winning gameplan for teaching reading to all students.

—**D. Ray Reutzel**, Senior Research Fellow, Center for the School of the Future, Utah State University

In their inimitable way Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Diane Lapp have organized a great deal of practical, evidence-based information into a readable, accessible book! It will become a veritable go-to resource with its comprehensive information.

—**Heidi Anne Mesmer**, Professor of Reading Education, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Three preeminent literacy scholars, Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Diane Lapp have done a masterful job of presenting to teachers, preservice and inservice, an actionable guide for implementing the science of reading. *Teaching Reading* is comprehensive coverage of the major competencies required to achieve proficiency in reading. With several unique features that allow readers to take an active role in going from anticipating to understanding to planning and applying the evidence-based strategies presented, this book is a major contribution to the field of literacy education.

—**Timothy Rasinski**, Professor of Literacy Education, Rebecca Tolle and Burton W. Gorman Chair in Educational Leadership, Kent State University

Possibly the most imaginative and informative resource on teaching reading on the market, this book engages readers through thoughtful interactive features that make you reflect, question, and further consider practices as it relates to your daily instruction. These authors and colleagues clearly know classroom instruction, and it shows in their writing. Want to know about the science of reading? This is your resource!

—**Susan B. Neuman**, Professor, Childhood Education and Literacy Development, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, New York University

Wondering how to make sense of all you’ve been reading about the science of reading? Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Diane Lapp offer us a text that makes gaining this knowledge our reality. These authors have the unique ability to write professional development books for teachers about current issues exactly at the time they are needed, and this new text reminds us that we must teach skills to children in addition to social and emotional and culturally responsive instruction. This reader-friendly book emphasizes skill development we have neglected to emphasize over the past few years and presents the information in a creative playbook format just right for teachers. Written with evidenced-based practice and thoughtfully organized in a manner that will enable teachers to improve their craft and consequently student achievement, this is a great resource for professional development in schools or as a text for university literacy courses.

—**Lesley Mandel Morrow**, Distinguished Professor, Director of the Center for Literacy Development, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

Organized around an expanded adaptation of Scarborough's reading rope, this user-friendly resource expertly translates scientific research findings into a comprehensive guide for reading instruction. Practical Illustrations and classroom examples abound throughout the playbook, allowing research-based recommendations to come to life to foster both word recognition and language comprehension in young learners. This book also encourages teachers to reflect on their own practice at many points and in many ways. A terrific resource!

—**Sonia Q. Cabell**, Associate Professor of Reading Education, School of Teacher Education & Florida Center for Reading Research, Florida State University

Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Diane Lapp reduce the clamor around the teaching of reading and bring clarity to how to develop strong readers. The authors not only give the *what* and the *why* but, more importantly, also provide interactive examples of the *how* to teach reading—and what our teachers need most is the *how*. The text is broken into neat learning modules that can be used in PLCs or study/book groups. I plan to use *Teaching Reading* as the core text in an interactive professional learning series for our staff. You should too!

—**Michael Rafferty**, Director of Teaching and Learning, Derby Public Schools, Author of *30 Big-Idea Lessons for Small Groups*

Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Diane Lapp have done the tremendous work of bringing depth and clarity to the foundational skills of reading. They provide a wealth of clear and intentional guidance that will support us [early elementary educators] in providing quality phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, word reading skills, and so on, so that children are confident in their ability to decode and contextualize what they've read.

—**Melissa Black**, Early Childhood Educator and Educational Consultant

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Teaching Reading

A PLAYBOOK FOR DEVELOPING SKILLED
READERS THROUGH WORD RECOGNITION
AND LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

GRADES PreK–6

DOUGLAS FISHER
NANCY FREY
DIANE LAPP

CORWIN

Fisher & Frey

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MODULE

I

How Reading Develops



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We'll start with a poem by poet, author, and lecturer Francis Ellen Watkins Harper (1812–1911), who was the first African American woman to publish a short story. Throughout her life she fought for the freedom of equal rights, job opportunities, and education for all.

In this module, we will

- Examine reading development through word recognition and language comprehension.
- Discuss the role of constrained and unconstrained reading skills in reading development.
- Review the role of metacognition in reading development.

Very soon the Yankee teachers
Came down and set up school;
But, oh! how the Rebs did hate it,—
It was agin' their rule.

Our masters always tried to hide
Book learning from our eyes;
Knowledge didn't agree with slavery—
'Twould make us all too wise.

But some of us would try to steal
A little from the book,
And put the words together,
And learn by hook or crook.

I remember Uncle Caldwell,
Who took pot-liquor fat
And greased the pages of his book,
And hid it in his hat.

And had his master ever seen
The leaves up on his head,
He'd have thought them greasy papers,
But nothing to be read.

And there was Mr. Turner's Ben,
Who heard the children spell,
And picked the words right up by heart,
And learned to read 'em well.

Source: Watkins Harper (n.d.)

What happened for you as your eyes processed the words? Did you have an emotional reaction? Did you make connections and see faces of students you've taught? Did you think about all the processes that occurred in your brain that allowed you to take those little squiggly lines from the page and make meaning of them? That's reading. It's an impressive set of skills that you just mobilized to make sense of the message.

Well, the Northern folks kept sending
The Yankee teachers down;
And they stood right up and helped us,
Though Rebs did sneer and frown.

And, I longed to read my Bible,
For precious words it said;
But when I begun to learn it,
Folks just shook their heads,

And said there is no use trying,
Oh! Chloe, you're too late;
But as I was rising sixty,
I had no time to wait.

So I got a pair of glasses,
And straight to work I went,
And never stopped till I could read
The hymns and Testament.

Then I got a little cabin—
A place to call my own—
And I felt as independent
As the queen upon her throne.

You weren't born reading. Your brain was taught to read, just like every other brain that reads. Unfortunately, there is no reading gene that is passed from one generation to the next. Experimental psychologist Steven Pinker notes that while "children are wired for sound[,] . . . print is an optional accessory that must be bolted on" (Pinker, 1999, p. ix).

Every brain needs to be taught to read. And over the past 100+ years, there have been hundreds of thousands of studies that together compose a science of reading. As Pearson and Tierney (2021) noted, there are waves of research as educators and researchers strive to understand this complex cognitive skill that serves as a gateway to all other learning.

Every brain needs to be taught to read.

Read each statement and mark **T** if you think the statement is true and **F** if you think the statement is false. As you read through the module, you might change your responses. Be prepared to explain your responses and use the text for evidence.

Before Reading	Statements	After Reading
T F	1. Word recognition skills must be mastered before language comprehension can be effectively taught.	T F
Why did you indicate true or false?		Has your thinking changed after reading?
T F	2. Constrained reading skills are easier to assess because they have a finite ceiling.	T F
Why did you indicate true or false?		Has your thinking changed after reading?
T F	3. Metacognition is an important skill for strategic readers to master.	T F
Why did you indicate true or false?		Has your thinking changed after reading?

“The Reading Rope”

Hollis Scarborough, a cognitive developmental psychologist who cheerfully reminds people that “I never taught anybody to read,” worked throughout the 1980s on a longitudinal study of preschoolers who were at risk for later reading difficulties. As a researcher, one of her responsibilities was to disseminate results to the field. In preparation for professional meetings, she conducted a review of the research on reading and drew a visual for her audiences to capture the existing research. True to her developmental orientation, she also wanted to portray how reading changes over time. The “reading rope,” as it is affectionately known, began its life in 1991 as a handout!

As Scarborough (2002) noted, there are strands that are each important and are represented within the two major skill bundles of language comprehension and word recognition. (See Figure 1.1 for our adaptation of the rope; italics indicate the new strands.) It’s important to note that strands within each bundle are intertwined to illustrate the increasing consolidation of skills needed for strategic and automatic processes to support children becoming skilled readers. To accomplish this, a future reader must develop all strands and mobilize them together. Importantly, one strand is not more important than the others, and the strands themselves do not represent a developmental sequence. In other words, the reading rope should not be misinterpreted as either a curriculum or an instructional framework.

The reading rope should not be misinterpreted as either a curriculum or an instructional framework.

Rather, it is a visual metaphor to represent the theoretical research on reading. As Scarborough noted in the interview,

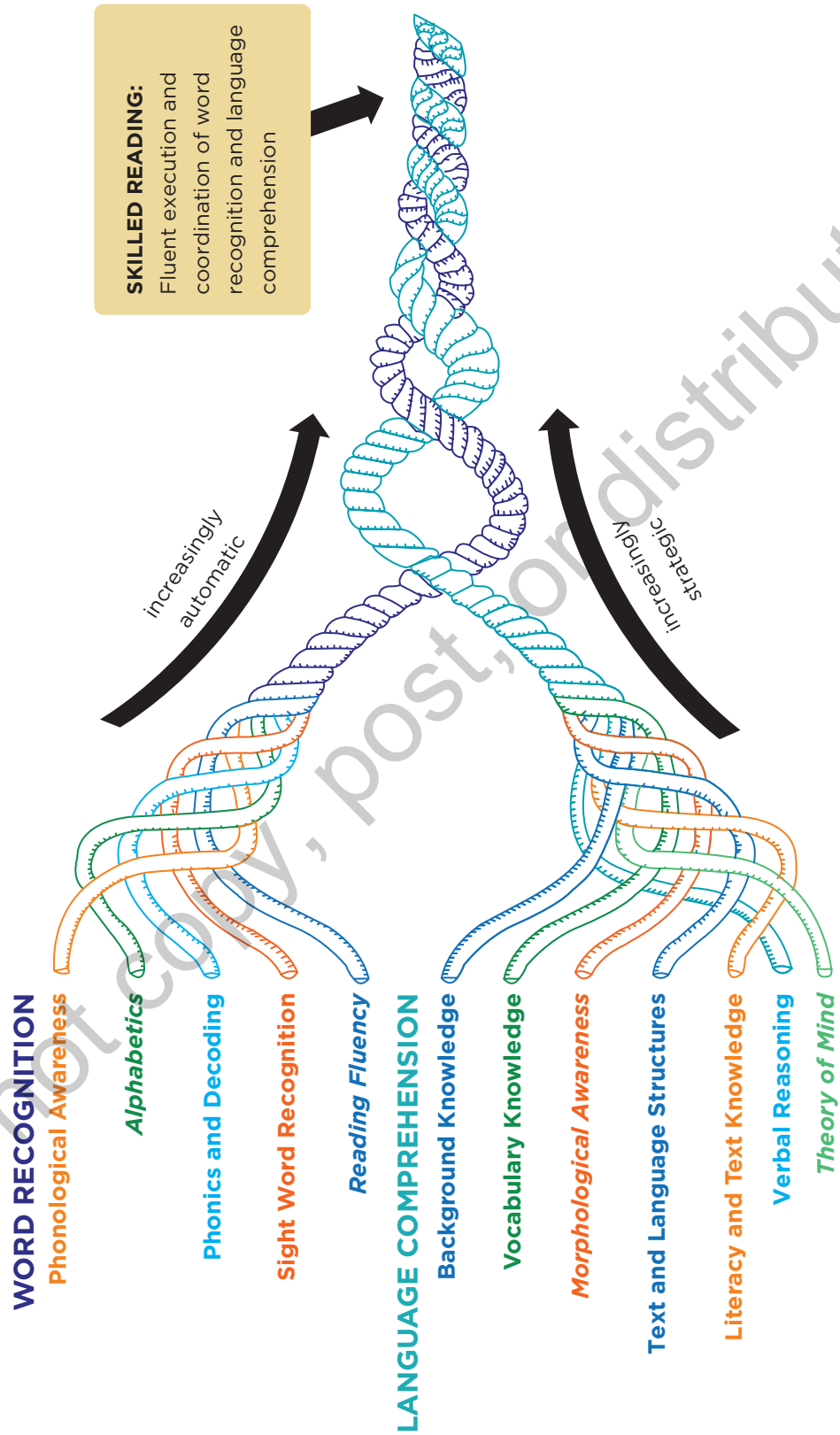
Being strong [in word recognition] affords more opportunities to acquire knowledge of [language comprehension], and being strong [in language comprehension] has been shown to enable faster and more accurate decoding of unfamiliar words. Therefore, if any of the strands gets frayed, it can hold back development of the other strands and by extension can eventually weaken the entire rope. (University of Florida Literacy Institute, 2020)

Although we appreciate what this visual infographic accomplishes in its attempt to convey the complexities of reading, it doesn’t fully reflect the waves of reading research that have continued since its publication two decades ago. Our adaptation to the original rope offers an expansion on Scarborough’s work. First, we added a stand-alone strand on *alphabets*. It was previously part of decoding, and certainly recognizing letters is an important aspect of decoding. But our collective knowledge about alphabets has grown, and readers need to understand so much about this that we elevated it. This is especially true for English learners who use other writing systems, such as those of Arabic, Georgian, or Mandarin. In addition, we have added a strand on *reading fluency* and included it in the word recognition bundle, because the goal of fluency instruction is to increase automaticity. The volume of research on fluency has grown considerably since the original publication of the reading rope and demands further attention.

In terms of language comprehension, we have added a strand on *morphological awareness* given the significant amount of research on this topic that has been conducted in the past 20 years. We have also included *theory of mind*, a newer area of literacy research that suggests readers need to develop an understanding of others’ mental states, such as beliefs, intents, desires, emotions, and knowledge, if they are to deeply understand the texts they read.

Language comprehension is the focus of the lower bundle. Readers use their understanding of print concepts and their literacy knowledge; background knowledge; vocabulary, morphology, literacy and text knowledge; and verbal reasoning to read and understand the text. These language comprehension skills become increasingly *strategic* through instruction, experience, and practice. In the top bundle, the focus is on word

Figure 1.1 The Reading Rope



Source: Adapted from Scarborough (2002).

recognition. This involves a student's understanding and use of phonological awareness, alphabets, and decoding, as well as their recognition of sight words and fluency. These word recognition skills become increasingly *automatic* through instruction, experience, and practice.

However, we must address the shortcomings that this visual infographic, albeit updated to reflect newer research, still holds. It can be tempting to view the rope as a recipe of ingredients. Wexler (2022) notes that it can lull educators into a sense of complacency, failing to fully challenge current instructional practices. The point of reading is to understand. Word recognition is crucial and cannot be minimized. But for reading to be fully realized, there must be a relentless focus on comprehension, not as a mere collection of ingredients but as a series of chemical reactions. The chemistry of reading comprehension requires building background knowledge (not just activating it), motivation (not just the hope that it will emerge), analytic thinking, and persistence to move forward when the text gets hard.

Reading comprehension is a science, and one that requires skill to develop among readers. We encourage you to read deeply and reflect on the modules that highlight each of these strands. They are not discrete items in a grocery store to be either selected or left on the shelf. Appreciate the chemical reactions that happen as a result of ingredients coming in contact with one another.

NOTICE AND WONDER

Review our adaptation of the reading rope. Note that each strand is one component of reading and that the strands combine into two bundles that are braided together into the rope.

What are you noticing about the various strands?

Which strands are strong in your classroom?

Which strands need more attention or are not yet clear to you?

Untangling *Skill, Skilled,* and *Strategic*

Look at the reading rope visual again. There are two arrows intended to represent change over time. The lower one is labeled “increasingly strategic” while the upper one is labeled “increasingly automatic.” The latter is more straightforward in that there is widespread and consistent usage of the term *automaticity*. Automaticity refers to smooth and effortless word recognition and was described by LaBerge and Samuels (1974) as the way print is processed in the brain. The braiding of the word recognition strands of the reading rope reflects the notion that the skills of phonological awareness, alphabets, decoding, and sight recognition work together in increasingly efficient ways to make this dimension of reading more fluent. It is an essential part of the journey to becoming a *skilled* reader.

However, the second term, *strategic*, is more problematic. Educators often informally use the terms *skill* and *strategy* interchangeably. Afflerbach et al. (2008) took on this topic and noted that

Reading *strategies* are deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader’s efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings of text. Reading *skills* are automatic actions that result in decoding and comprehension with speed, efficiency, and fluency and usually occur without awareness of the components or control involved. (p. 368; emphasis added)

As reading develops, the ability to be strategic (solve problems) while moving smoothly and accurately through text (automatic) consolidate into a tight process. To our thinking, the goal is to develop *skilled* readers—those who deploy the strategies they have learned with great automaticity. In other words, they have developed habits they use almost without thinking about them. And, when texts are complex, they revert to known strategies to regain meaning. Our desired outcome is the development of skilled readers. In order to accomplish this, we teach reading skills such that a reader can use them strategically when reading is a challenge.

**The goal is to develop
skilled readers—
those who deploy
the strategies they
have learned with
great automaticity.**

WHAT’S YOUR ADVICE?

How might you respond to a colleague who says that literacy develops naturally in children or that there is no need to teach students to map sounds onto letters?

Constrained and Unconstrained Reading Skills

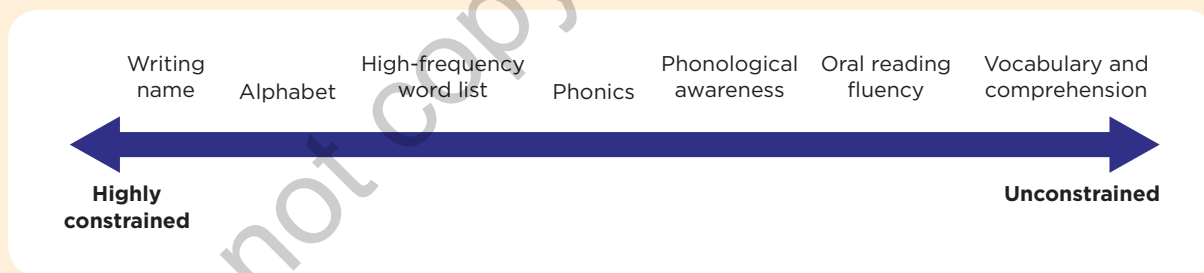
Now let's go more deeply into a discussion of reading skills. Reading researcher Scott Paris (2005) described a variety of reading skills across a continuum from *constrained* to *unconstrained*. Constrained reading skills are those that have boundaries or upper limits. Some reading skills, such as phonemic awareness, alphabetic, grapheme-phoneme correspondences, basic print concepts, and oral reading fluency, are constrained reading skills, because they have a finite point at which they are learned. For instance, there are 44 phonemes in English and 26 letters. As well, there is a finite number of letter combinations that represent the sounds. And there is a limit as to the rate of reading one can sustain without sacrificing accuracy and meaning. Because these skills are constrained, we can count them, and as such they are more easily measured. There also are some of foundational reading skills that readers must acquire.

Keep Scarborough's reminder in mind: Strength in one bundle (language comprehension or word recognition) influences and acts upon the other bundle.

However, mastery of these reading skills alone is not the final destination. If it were, we wouldn't need to provide much instruction beyond elementary school. But true reading is much more than accurate word identification. All of us spend a lifetime acquiring what Paris calls the unconstrained reading skills of background knowledge, vocabulary, and comprehension. Unlike constrained skills, unconstrained skills have no endpoint. Your vocabulary is more expansive today than it was five years ago, and your reading comprehension of many topics will be greater and deeper five years from now if you keep reading and learning. As you read and experience life, you're continually adding to your background

knowledge, which influences both your vocabulary and your comprehension of text. Notice the continuum of constraints described by Stahl (2011) in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 Continuum of Constraint



Source: Stahl (2011).

So effective reading instruction involves both constrained and unconstrained skills development. No responsible teacher would limit attention to constrained skills while ignoring vocabulary and reading comprehension. But once the constrained skills are learned, there is no additional benefit to continuing to teach them. Therefore, attention to constrained skills instruction fades as students acquire them. Unfortunately, there are older students who have yet to automate these constrained skills and continue to require instruction to build the skills needed to read texts that are appropriate for them. As students master the constrained skills, vocabulary and reading comprehension take an even more dominant role. However, keep Scarborough's reminder in mind: Strength in

one bundle (language comprehension or word recognition) influences and acts upon the other bundle.

FIND THE MISTAKE

A list of constrained and unconstrained skills was developed, but there are errors in it. Identify which of the following should not be in each column.

Constrained Skills	Unconstrained Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Letter recognition• Print concepts• Oral language• Phoneme awareness• Grapheme-phoneme correspondences• Verbal reasoning• Sight word recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vocabulary• Comprehension• Syntax• Morphology• Background knowledge• Critical analysis• Inference• Author’s craft

Which errors did you identify? _____

Why are these incorrect? _____

NOTES

Metacognitive Strategy Use in Reading

We can't leave this opening module on skilled reading without discussing the importance of metacognition in reading. Metacognition is evidenced through reflection and decision-making about the strategies deployed by a reader, such as pausing to reflect, being aware of their personal perspectives, or engaging in retrospection by

looking backward at past events in the story. The ability to reflect upon and think about one's thinking and monitor one's thinking are essential for learning (e.g., Flavell, 1979).

The ability to reflect upon and think about one's thinking and monitor one's thinking are essential for learning.

The term *metacognition* means "above cognition" and works in parallel to the skills and knowledge (cognition) needed to complete complex tasks. And reading for understanding, to be sure, is a complex task.

A reader with a high degree of metacognitive awareness approaches reading as a conscious act and recognizes that they are in command of their own understanding. Metacognitive readers don't view the act of reading as simply moving their eyes down line after line of the text. They reflect, monitor their thoughts and understanding, summarize along the way, generate questions and images, and so on. They notice when they have lost meaning and manage their strategies to recover meaning. Much like a master craftsman, these readers not only have a full toolbox, but they are also able to select the right tool to accomplish the goal.

Importantly, strategy use is not limited to older students or only for comprehension. Imagine the young child who is trying to blend sounds or chunk word parts to decode text. They must be taught strategies and then use those strategies. Students learn strategies to predict long versus short vowels, for example. Again, it's the repeated application of the strategies that is so important.

TAKE ACTION

Consider the following strategies of highly effective readers, and then analyze the reading behaviors of your students. Which of these need to be further developed in students? Do you have a plan to model these for students? Do you have a way to monitor students' progress in developing metacognition? In the modules of the language comprehension bundle, we'll explore these strategies further.

Strategy	Definition
Activating	"Priming the cognitive pump" in order to recall relevant prior knowledge and experiences from long-term memory in order to extract and construct meaning from text
Inferring	Bringing together what is spoken (written) in the text, what is unspoken (unwritten) in the text, and what is already known by the reader in order to extract and construct meaning from the text
Monitoring-Clarifying	Thinking about how and what one is reading, both during and after the act of reading, for purposes of determining if one is comprehending the text combined with the ability to clarify and fix up any mix-ups

Strategy	Definition
Questioning	Engaging in learning dialogues with text (authors), peers, and teachers through self-questioning, question generation, and question answering
Searching-Selecting	Searching a variety of sources in order to select appropriate information to answer questions, define words and terms, clarify misunderstandings, solve problems, or gather information
Summarizing	Restating the meaning of text in one's own words—different words from those used in the original text
Visualizing-Organizing	Constructing a mental image or graphic organizer for the purpose of extracting and constructing meaning from the text

Source: McEwan (2007).

TEXT-TO-SELF CONNECTION

Now consider your own knowledge of reading development as it applies to your students. What in this module was confirming for you? What new information did you add to your conceptual understanding of reading development? Fill in the table below to record your top two confirmations and top two instances of new knowledge gained from this module.













Confirming Knowledge in the Reading	
1.	
2.	
New Knowledge From the Reading	
1.	
2.	

The subsequent modules are organized broadly around the reading rope, as it serves as a great visual metaphor to discuss the literacy field's continuously deepening knowledge base of how to teach children to become skilled readers. Before moving forward, take a few minutes to reflect on your current practices in reading instruction. The next five modules will focus on the word recognition bundle, while the subsequent seven modules will discuss dimensions of the language comprehension bundle. How would you describe your level of confidence in your knowledge of instructional practices for each of these topics? Use your reflection as a guide for your playbook plan.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Using the traffic light scale, with red being not confident, yellow being somewhat confident, and green indicating very confident, how confident are you in your ability to teach toward these topics?

Word Recognition Strands	
Module 2: Phonological Awareness	
Module 3: Alphabets	
Module 4: Phonics and Decoding	
Module 5: Sight Word Recognition	
Module 6: Reading Fluency	
Language Comprehension Strands	
Module 7: Background Knowledge	
Module 8: Vocabulary Knowledge	
Module 9: Morphological Awareness	
Module 10: Text and Language Structures	
Module 11: Literacy and Text Knowledge	
Module 12: Verbal Reasoning	
Module 13: Theory of Mind	

Takeaways

- Reading is a complex process, and each brain needs to be taught to read, because there is no reading gene that is passed down from one generation to the next.
- Readers need to develop their automatic and strategic processes.
- There are two major bundles of strands, word recognition and language comprehension, that are braided together to develop skilled readers.
- Some skills have a ceiling, meaning that there isn't more to learn once the content is mastered. There are other skills that continue to develop across the life span.

PS: The answers to the anticipation guide are F, T, T.