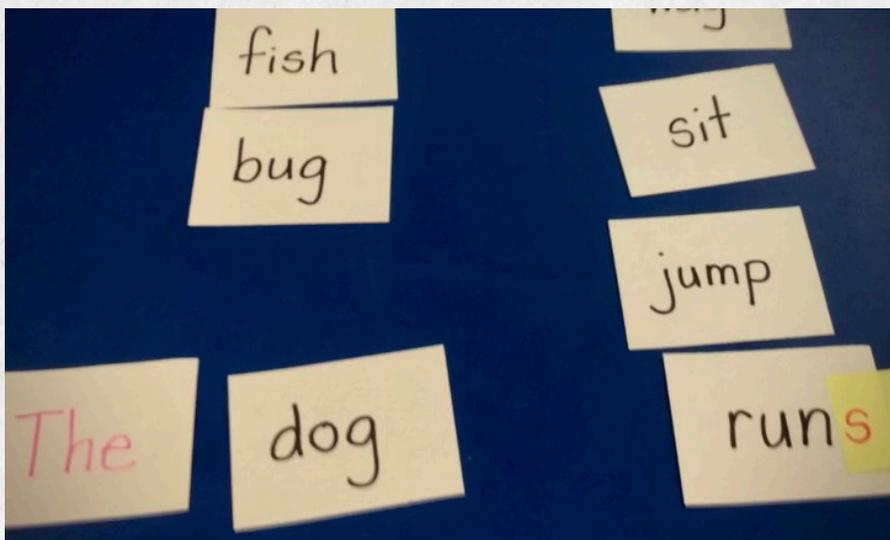


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Literacyhow
Empower teaching excellence.

March Newsletter



At Literacy How we believe that literacy is the key to opportunity and that **every** child has the right to read. We also believe that teachers, not programs or products, teach students to read, write and spell, and we are committed to supporting teachers as they learn to translate the science of reading in their classrooms.

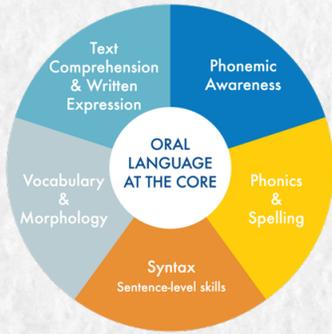
Our monthly newsletters provide an opportunity to share some of the research and tools we believe will be helpful to teachers in their classrooms throughout the school year. Last month's newsletter focused on Fluency and this month we will dive into **Syntax**.

Syntax, a linguist's word for sentence structures, is the rule system that governs how words and phrases are arranged into clauses and sentences. Grammar, though related, is not the same as syntax. It has to

do with the function (i.e., role) of words and phrases in a sentence. Syntax can be thought of as a bridge between reading fluency and comprehension. When students read text fluently, with prosody, they are parsing the text in grammatical phrases which facilitates their comprehension.

Learning syntax and grammar helps students clarify meaning within and between sentences. Studies show a close relationship between an individual's syntactic awareness and reading comprehension; that is, as students learn to use more complex sentences in oral and written language, their ability to make sense of what they read increases as well

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WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR?

Grammar refers to a set of rules for a language, including how words and sentences are formed and standards for correct usage. Syntax is the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences. One way to relate the two is to think of grammar being to syntax as what letters are to words (Eberhardt, Perspectives, 2013).

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO TEACH THE PROPER NAMES OF THE PARTS OF SPEECH?

Teachers should begin grammar instruction with young children by talking about the function of words. For example, a noun is called a **namer** because it names a person, place, or thing. Eventually, however, it is important to teach the proper grammatical terms (e.g., noun, adverb, etc.). When students are explicitly taught the names for the parts of speech using child-friendly language, then given practice applying these terms in oral language activities, there is a common language of instruction.

Videos

A Syntax-focused Kindergarten Lesson

This syntax-focused kindergarten lesson includes a review of short vowel sounds and gestures, reading and sorting decodable words into nouns and verbs, action expansion, and practice reading sentences for prosody.

Watch as Literacy How Mentor, Elke Blanchard, helps children understand that sentences have a who and a do.

We begin this instruction in kindergarten by explaining to students that sentences have a who or what (a **namer** because a noun names a person, place, or thing) and a **do** (an action word that tells what the who is doing). We have the children sort pictures into the **who/what** column or the **do** column on a pocket chart. Then they choose a picture from the who column (dogs) and combine it with a picture from the do column (bark) to make a sentence.



Tips and ideas for Instruction

Teacher Tip: Ask About Word Function

Teach students to ask a series of questions about the function of words that will help them label the 'parts of speech'. For young children, we refer to the parts of speech as the building blocks of sentences. Here's a sample sentence: Our wet, hairy dog crawled under my bed during the thunderstorm.

- Ask who or what did it? **dog** (looking for the namer/noun – the **who/what**)
- Ask what did it do? **crawled** (looking for the action word/verb – the **do**)
- Ask 'how many, what kind, which one? **wet, hairy** (looking for adjectives describing the namer)
- Ask where, when, how, why? **under the bed, during the thunderstorm** (looking for adverbs that tell about the action)

Explicit instruction in function-based questions can improve both sentence-level comprehension and sentence writing.

Teacher Tip: Formal Frames

Start with oral language activities to develop syntactic awareness in order to improve sentence comprehension.

Use this [formal frame activity](#) to help students produce competent verbal or written responses. These begin as sentence starters, but add critical grammatical and lexical clarification and support.

Teacher Tip: Teach Syntax in Context

Evidence suggests that studying syntax and grammar out of context through rote memorization does not result in improved performance. Integrate syntax/grammar instruction into the revision and editing process. Pull individual sentences from students' text as well as their writing to help them make sense of various sentence structures. You can also ask them to combine two short sentences from their writing to make a more complex sentence that includes conjunctions.

Principal Tip: PD Support

Provide adequate professional development time for teachers to learn how to observe students' oral language behaviors and analyze their written expression for signs of difficulties with syntactic awareness and sentence level comprehension skills.

Something to read

Read more to learn more!

Cain, K. (Spring 2009). [Making sense of text](#). Perspectives on Language and Literacy 35 (2), 11-14.

Eberhardt, N.C. (Summer 2013). [Syntax: Its role in literacy learning](#). Perspectives on Language and Literacy.

Scott, C. M. (April 2009). [A case for the sentence in reading comprehension](#). Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools 40: 184-191.

Steffani, S. (Spring 2007). [Identifying embedded and conjoined complex sentences: Making it simple](#). Contemporary Issues in Communication Science and Disorders 34, 44-54.

Resources

The **Literacy How Professional Learning Series** translates the latest reading research into how-to instruction. The Knowledge to Practice book Series—Phonemic Awareness and Phonics, **Syntax**, Vocabulary, and Comprehension—is based on the current and comprehensive Literacy How reading model. It draws upon the authors' decades of expertise and experience working with thousands of general and special education teachers. Based on Chall's Stages of Reading Development, the Series emphasizes Pre-K-3rd grade conceptual and skill development. Teachers of older emerging or struggling readers will also find these tools

useful.

Each book contains relevant research, knowledge for effective instruction, activities for instruction and informal assessment, and text selection skills analysis.

[Purchase Syntax Knowledge to Practice Book on Amazon](#)

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