

Effective Beginning Reading Programs

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What beginning reading programs* have been proven to help students in grades K-1 to succeed? To find out, this review summarizes evidence on four types of programs designed to improve beginning reading achievement:

- **Reading Curricula (Curr)**, such as *Open Court Reading*, *Reading Street*, and other standard and alternative textbooks.
- **Instructional Technology (IT)**, such as *Waterford*, *Lexia Learning Systems*, and *Writing to Read*.
- **Instructional Process Programs (IP)**, such as cooperative learning and phonological awareness training.
- **Combined Curriculum and Instructional Process Programs (Curr & IP)**, such as *Success for All* and *Direct Instruction*.

General Findings

Overall, 63 experimental-control comparisons met the inclusion criteria, of which 19 used random assignment to treatments. Effect sizes (experimental-control differences as a proportion of a standard deviation) were averaged across studies, weighting by sample size.

Reading Curricula (Curr). Studies of reading curricula found minimal effects of using particular textbooks. Mean weighted effect size across 7 studies: +0.12.

Instructional Technology (IT). Studies of IT also found minimal effects. Mean weighted effect size across 13 studies: +0.09.

Instructional Process Programs (IP). Studies of programs that provide extensive professional development to help teachers use well-specified teaching methods had relatively positive effects overall. Mean weighted effect size across 17 studies: +0.37. Particularly positive effects were found for cooperative learning (ES=+0.46), phonics-focused professional development

* Note: This review focuses on initial (non-remedial) reading programs. A review of research on programs for struggling readers is also available on the BEE at www.bestevidence.org/reading/strug/strug_read.htm.


(ES=+0.43), and teaching of phonological awareness to kindergartners (ES=+0.22 at the end of first or second grades).



Combined Curriculum and Instructional Process Programs (Curr & IP). Programs that combine innovative phonetic materials with extensive professional development for teachers found positive effects overall. In particular, positive effects were found for *Success for All* (ES=+0.29 in 23 studies).

Program Ratings

Listed below are currently available programs, grouped by strength of effectiveness. Within each group, programs are listed alphabetically. The type for each program corresponds to the categories above (e.g., IP = Instructional Process Strategies).

Strong Evidence of Effectiveness




Rating	Program	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)	IP	A technique in which children work in pairs, taking turns as teacher and learner, to learn a structured sequence of literacy skills, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, sound blending, passage reading, and story retelling.	E-mail: pals@vanderbilt.edu Website: kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals

Rating	Program	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Reading Reels	IP	A form of multimedia used within the Success for All program (see below), in which video content is embedded within teachers' lessons. Brief animation, puppet skits, and live-action segments, about five minutes daily in total, model beginning reading strategies for children and teachers.	E-mail: sfainfo@successforall.org Website: www.successforall.org
	Success for All	Curr + IP	Provides schools with a K-5 reading curriculum that focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and vocabulary development, beginning with phonetically-controlled mini-books in grades K-1. Cooperative learning is extensively used at all grade levels. Tutoring is provided to struggling readers, and parent involvement is encouraged.	E-mail: sfainfo@successforall.org Website: www.successforall.org





Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness

 **None**

Limited Evidence of Effectiveness: Strong Evidence of Modest Effects

Rating	Program	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Direct Instruction	Curr + IP	An approach to beginning reading instruction that emphasizes a step-by-step approach to phonics, decodable texts that make use of a unique initial teaching alphabet, and structured, scripted manuals for teachers.	E-mail: info@nifdi.org Website: www.nifdi.org
	Open Court Reading	Curr	A basal text book series that uses phonetic readers in early grades, a focus on direct instruction of specific skills throughout the program, scripted teachers' manuals, teacher training, and follow-up.	Complete contact form at: www.sraonline.com/customer_service_feedback.html Website: www.sraonline.com/oc_home.html
	Scholastic Phonics Readers with Literacy Place	Curr	A supplementary phonics instructional program designed as an optional addition to Literacy Place, Scholastic's basal reading text, that incorporates phonetic texts to provide intensive phonics practice in the context of engaging stories.	Complete contact form at: www.scholastic.com/custsupport/contact_us.htm Website: teacher.scholastic.com/literacyplace




Limited Evidence of Effectiveness: Weak Evidence with Notable Effects



Rating	Program	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Classwide Peer Tutoring	IP	A cooperative learning approach in which children regularly work in pairs, engage in structured tutoring activities, and frequently reverse roles.	E-mail: greenwood@ku.edu
	Early Reading Research	IP	A whole-class reading program in which children are taught as a whole class, rather than in small reading groups. Teachers are given professional development in structured, systematic methods of teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and oral reading.	E-mail: j.e.solity@warwick.ac.uk
	Four Blocks	IP	A professional development approach in which teachers in grades 1-3 use nonability-grouped, multi-level instruction.	E-mail: fourblocks@carsondellosa.com Website: www.four-blocks.com
	Ladders to Literacy	IP	A professional development program for kindergarten that focuses on phonics and phonemic awareness, rhyming, and letter sounds. Teachers receive extensive training and follow-up.	E-mail: anotari@wri-edu.org Website: www.wri-edu.org/ladders/about.htm

Best Evidence
Encyclopedia (BEE)

Empowering Educators with Evidence on Proven Programs

www.bestevidence.org

Rating	Program	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Lexia Learning Systems	IT	Computer software designed to help beginning readers learn word-attack skills. Children work independently at computer stations through an individualized, structured series of activities that progress from words in isolation to sentences and paragraphs.	E-mail: info@lexialearning.com Website: www.lexialearning.com
	Open Court Phonics Kit	Curr	Provides teachers with extensive training and materials to teach phonics skills.	Complete contact form at: www.sraonline.com/customer-service-feedback.html Website: www.sraonline.com/products.html?tid=7&sid=675
	Orton-Gillingham approach	IP	A structured, phonetic reading approach that uses multisensory teaching, emphasizing visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile teaching strategies.	E-mail: info@ortonacademy.org Website: www.ortonacademy.org

Rating	Program	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Reading and Integrated Literacy Strategies (RAILS)	IP	Provides children in grades K-2 with a second reading period each day to supplement their 60-90 minute reading, and provides teachers with extensive professional development focusing on explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and vocabulary.	E-mail: RJS15@PSU.EDU
	Sing, Spell, Read, and Write	IP	A phonetic approach to beginning reading and writing instruction that uses songs, phonetic storybooks, and systematic, step-by-step development of word attack skills.	E-mail: k12cs@custhelp.com Website: www.pearsonschool.com

 **Insufficient Evidence of Effectiveness**

Destination Reading
 Headsprout
 Plato Focus
 Reading Machine
 Reading Street
 The Literacy Center
 Waterford
 Writing to Read

N No Qualifying Studies

100 Book Challenge
 ABD's of Reading
 Academy of Reading

Accelerated Literacy Learning
Accelerated Reader
AfterSchool KidzLit
Alphabetic Phonics
Barton Reading & Spelling System
Be a Better Reader
Breakthrough to Literacy
Carbo Reading Styles
Caught Reading
CCC
Charlesbridge Reading Fluency
Classworks
Compass Reading
Comprehension Plus
Comprehension Upgrade
Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI)
Conceptually-Based Strategy Instruction
Consistency Management Cooperative Discipline (CMCD)
Cross-Aged Literacy Program
Digitexts
Disciplinary Literacy
Discover Intensive Phonics for Yourself
Dolch Reading Program
Early Reading Intervention (ERI)
Early Success
Earobics
EasyTech
Edmark Reading Program
Electronic Bookshelf
Elements of Reading: Comprehension
Elements of Reading: Fluency
Elements of Reading: Vocabulary
Essential Learning System
Failure Free Reading
Fast ForWord
Fast Track Reading
First Steps
Fluency First
Fluency Formula
Fluent Reader

FOCUS Reading and Language Program
Foundations and Frameworks
Fountas Pinnell Units of Study (Heineman)
Foundations
Funnix Reading Programs
Glass-Analysis method
Great Books
Great Leaps
Harcourt Collections
Harcourt Signatures
Harcourt Trophies
Houghton Mifflin Nation's Choice
Houghton Mifflin Reading
Headsprout Early Reading
Heinemann, Literacy World
Heinemann, Rigby Star
Hodder & Stoughton, Fast Forward
Hooked on Phonics®
Horizons
HOSTS
Houghton Mifflin Horizons
Houghton Mifflin Invitations to Literacy
Houghton Mifflin Legacy of Literacy
Imagine It!
IndiVisual Reading
Intensive Reading Strategies Instruction (IRSI) Model
Intensive Supplemental Reading
Invitations to Literacy
Irlen Method
Jacob's Ladder
Jolly Phonics
Jostens/Compass Learning
Kaleidoscope
Kar2ouche
Kindergarten Works
Knowledge Box
K-W-L strategy
Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling
Language First!
Language for Thinking

LANGUAGE!

LeapTrack Assessment & Instruction System
Learning Experience Approach
Learning to Read
Learning Upgrade
Lightspan
Like to Read
Lindamood-Bell
LiPS
LitART
Literacy by Design
Literacy Seminar
Little Books
Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Treasures
Making Connections
McGraw-Hill Reading
McGraw-Hill Spotlight on Literacy
McGraw-Hill Treasures/Triumphs
McRAT
Merit Software
My Reading Coach
Open Book Anywhere
OpenBook to Literacy
Oxford Reading Tree Stage 1 & 2 First Phonics Talking Stories
Oxford University Press Reading Tree
Pathways
Phonetics First-Focus on Sounds
Phonics and Friends
Phonics First Foundations
Phonics for Reading
Phono-Graphix
Project Read
Putting Reading First in Your Classroom
Questioning the Author
Quicktionary Reading Pen II
Read Naturally
Read Now
READ RIGHT
Read, Write & Type!
ReadAbout

Reading Apprenticeship
Reading Horizons
Reading in the Content Areas
Reading Plus
Reading Success
Reading to Learn
Reading Triumphs
Reading Upgrade
Read Well
Responsive Classroom
Rigby Reading
Rosetta Stone Literacy
Ruth Miskin Literacy
S.P.I.R.E. and Sounds Sensible
Saxon Phonics
Say Cheese! Early Years and Say Cheese Infants
Scaffolded Reading Experience
Schoolwide Enrichment Reading Model (SEM-R)
Seeing Stars
SIM-Strategic Instruction Model
Six Minute Solution
Slingerland
Smart Way Reading and Spelling
Sound Sheets
Spalding Method
Spell Read
SRA Reading
START-IN
STEPS (Sequential Teaching of Explicit Phonics and Spelling)
Strategic Literacy Initiative
Success in Reading and Writing
SuccessMaker
Sunshine
TeachFirst
Teaching Reading Essentials
Tell a Tale 2
Text Mapping Strategy
Text Talk
The Imagination Station
Thinking Works

Transactional Strategies Instruction
Tune in to Reading
Visualizing and Verbalizing
Vocabulary Improvement Program
Voices Reading
Voyager Passport
Voyager TimeWarp Plus
Voyager Universal Literacy
Wilson Reading
Wright Group Literacy
WriteToLearn

Review Methods





An exhaustive search considered more than 2000 published and unpublished articles. It included those that met the following criteria.

- Schools or classrooms using each program had to be compared to randomly assigned or well-matched control groups.
- Study duration had to be at least 12 weeks.
- Outcome measures had to be assessment of the reading content being taught in all classes. Almost all are standardized tests or state assessments.
- The review placed particular emphasis on studies in which schools, teachers, or students were assigned at random to experimental or control groups.

Program Ratings Basis

Programs were rated according to the overall strength of the evidence support in their effects on reading achievement. “Effect size” (ES) is the proportion of a standard deviation by which a treatment exceeds a control group. Average effect sizes were weighted by sample sizes in computing means. The categories are as follows:

- **Strong Evidence of Effectiveness:** At least two studies, one of which is a large randomized or randomized quasi-experimental study, or multiple smaller studies, with a sample size-weighted effect size of at least +0.20, and a collective sample size across all studies of 500 students or 20 classes.

-  **Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness:** At least one randomized or two matched studies of any qualifying design, with a collective sample size of 250 students or 10 classes, and a weighted mean effect size of at least +0.20.
 -  **Limited Evidence of Effectiveness: Strong Evidence of Modest Effects:** Studies meet the criteria for ‘moderate evidence of effectiveness’ except that the weighted mean effect size is +0.10 to +0.19.
 -  **Limited Evidence of Effectiveness: Weak Evidence with Notable Effects:** Studies have a weighted mean effect size of at least +0.20, but do not qualify for ‘moderate evidence of effectiveness’ due to insufficient numbers of studies or small sample sizes.
 -  **Insufficient Evidence of Effectiveness:** Qualifying studies do not meet the criteria for “limited evidence of effectiveness.”
- N No Qualifying studies:** No studies meet inclusion standards.

Full Report

Slavin, R.E., Lake, C., Chambers, B., Cheung, A., & Davis, S. Effective beginning reading programs: A best evidence synthesis. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education.
http://www.bestevidence.org/reading/begin_read/begin_read.htm