Steps for Facilitating the Research-based Adult Reading Instruction Study Circle

TO DO BEFORE SESSION ONE

<u>Send out the Pre-Meeting Packet to confirmed participants two weeks before the first session.</u> It's also a good idea to call participants one week before the first session to confirm that they received the packet.

The Pre-Meeting Packet for the Research-based Adult Reading Instruction Study Circle should include the ten items listed below, all of which follow and are ready for photocopying.

We suggest that you organize handouts and readings for participants in two-sided pocket folders and distribute a folder of materials to each participant.

A reminder about the cover letter: You will need to write in the place, date, and time of the first meeting and your telephone number and e-mail address into the letter and sign it before you make copies.

<u>Contents of Pre-Meeting Packet</u>

- Information about the Research-Based Adult Reading Instruction Study Circle (cover letter)

- What Is a Study Circle?

- What Study Circles Are, and Are Not: A Comparison

- The Role of the Participant

- Components of Reading

- Research-based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction: Executive Summary*

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* **Note to Facilitator.** The full 130-page document is not included in this study circle guide, but many participants want to have the full document. You can obtain copies for the participants in your study circle in two ways:

1. To order multiple paper copies of the document directly from NIFL, please contact NIFL at **(202) 233-2025.**
2. The document is available on the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) Web site. You are free to photocopy this document for all participants in the study circle. To download this document, go to:
   www.nifl.gov/nifl/partnershipforreading/publications/adult.html

- Quick Summaries of the Reading Research

- Synopsis of Instructional Models

- Quantitative and Qualitative Research

- Participants' To-Do Form

Information about the Research–based Adult Reading Instruction Study Circle

Date:

Dear Participant:

Thank you for registering to participate in the Research-based Adult Reading Instruction Study Circle. I really look forward to meeting with you. This study circle was developed by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL).

We will meet three times, and each meeting will be 3½ hours in length for a total of 10½ hours. The first meeting is at [*insert* location] on [*insert* month, day, year] at [*insert* time].

At each session, we will be discussing readings about reading research. Some of these have been produced by NCSALL and some are from other sources. I will be providing you with copies of all the readings.

Before the first meeting, please look at the Participants' To-Do Form and read all the materials before the first session as suggested. We will be discussing these handouts and readings at the first meeting.

I have enclosed a folder for you to keep all of the materials for this study circle. Please bring this folder and all the materials with you to each of our meetings.

If you have any questions about the study circle in general or about what to do before our first meeting, please call me at [*insert* facilitator's telephone number] or send me an e-mail at [*insert* facilitator's e-mail address].

I'm looking forward to some great discussions with all of you.

Sincerely,

[*insert* facilitator's name and title]

What is a study circle?

A study circle:

- is a process for small-group deliberation that is voluntary and participatory;

- is a small group, usually 8 to 12 participants;

- is led by a facilitator who is impartial, who helps manage the deliberation process, but is not an "expert" or "teacher" in the traditional sense;

- considers many perspectives, rather than advocating a particular point of view;

- uses ground rules to set the tone for a respectful, productive discussion;

- is rooted in dialogue and deliberation, not debate;

- has multiple sessions which move from personal experience of the issue, to considering multiple viewpoints, to strategies for action;

- does not require consensus, but uncovers areas of agreement and common concern;

- provides an opportunity for citizens to work together to improve their community.

What study circles are, and are not: A comparison

A study circle IS:

- **a small-group discussion** involving deliberation and problem solving, in which an issue is examined from many perspectives; it is enriched by the members' knowledge and experience, and often informed by expert information and discussion materials; it is aided by an impartial facilitator whose job is to manage the discussion.

A study circle is NOT the same as:

- **conflict resolution,** a set of principles and techniques used in resolving conflict between individuals or groups. (Study circle facilitators and participants sometimes use these techniques in study circles.)

- **mediation,** a process used to settle disputes that relies on an outside neutral person to help the disputing parties come to an agreement. (Mediators often make excellent study circle facilitators, and have many skills in common.)

- **a focus group,** a small group usually organized to gather or test information from the members. Respondents (who are sometimes paid) are often recruited to represent a particular viewpoint or target audience.

- **traditional education with teachers and pupils,** where the teacher or an expert imparts knowledge to the students.

- **a facilitated meeting with a predetermined outcome,** such as a committee or board meeting with goals established ahead of time. A study circle begins with a shared interest among its members, and unfolds as the process progresses.

- **a town meeting,** a large-group meeting which is held to get public input on an issue, or to make a decision on a community policy.

- **a public hearing,** a large-group public meeting which allows concerns to be aired.

The role of the participant

The following points are intended to help you, the participant, make the most of your study circle experience, and to suggest ways in which you can help the group.

- **Listen carefully to others.** Try to understand the concerns and values that underlie their views.

- **Maintain an open mind.** You don't score points by rigidly sticking to your early statements. Feel free to explore ideas that you have rejected or not considered in the past.

- **Strive to understand the position of those who disagree with you.** Your own knowledge is not complete until you understand other participants' points of view and why they feel the way they do.

- **Help keep the discussion on track.** Make sure your remarks are relevant.

- Speak your mind freely, but don't monopolize the discussion. Make sure you are giving others the chance to speak.

- **Address your remarks to the group members rather than the facilitator.** Feel free to address your remarks to a particular participant, especially one who has not been heard from or who you think may have special insight. Don't hesitate to question other participants to learn more about their ideas.

- **Communicate your needs to the facilitator.** The facilitator is responsible for guiding the discussion, summarizing key ideas, and soliciting clarification of unclear points, but he or she may need advice on when this is necessary. Chances are, you are not alone when you don't understand what someone has said.

- **Value your own experience and opinions.** Don't feel pressured to speak, but realize that failing to speak means robbing the group of your wisdom.

- **Engage in friendly disagreement.** Differences can invigorate the group, especially when it is relatively homogeneous on the surface. Don't hesitate to challenge ideas you disagree with, and don't take it personally if someone challenges your ideas.

Components of Reading

Alphabetics is the whole process of using the letters in an alphabet to represent spoken words.

- It includes an awareness that words are made up of basic sounds (phonemes) and knowledge of the relationship between these basic sounds and the letters used to represent them (word analysis or phonics).

- Learners demonstrate their *phonemic awareness* with tasks that require the manipulation of basic sounds in words, removing sounds from words for example (*cat* becomes *at* when the first sound in removed), or adding sounds (*at* becomes *cat*).

- *Phonics instruction* teaches individual letter-sound correspondences (the sounds made by the letters *b, t,* and *oa,* for example), and how individual letter-sound combinations are blended together to form words, *b-oa-t*).

- *Word analysis instruction* includes phonics as well as other ways to recognize words. Sight word recognition, for example, is taught along with phonics. Common and irregularly spelled words (*was, want, to*) are taught so that they are recognized on sight as whole words rather than being analyzed into smaller parts and blended.

- Morphology, or the use of prefixes, suffixes, and compounding to form words, may also be taught as an aid to word recognition.

Fluency in reading is the ability to read with speed and ease.

- When readers are fluent, they read accurately, without making mistakes in pronunciation, at an appropriate rate, and with proper intonation and rhythm.

Vocabulary is a term used to refer to all of the words in a language.

- One person's vocabulary consists of all the words the person understands or knows the meanings of.

- "Vocabulary words" in reading instruction are usually those words that a person is studying in order to learn their meanings.
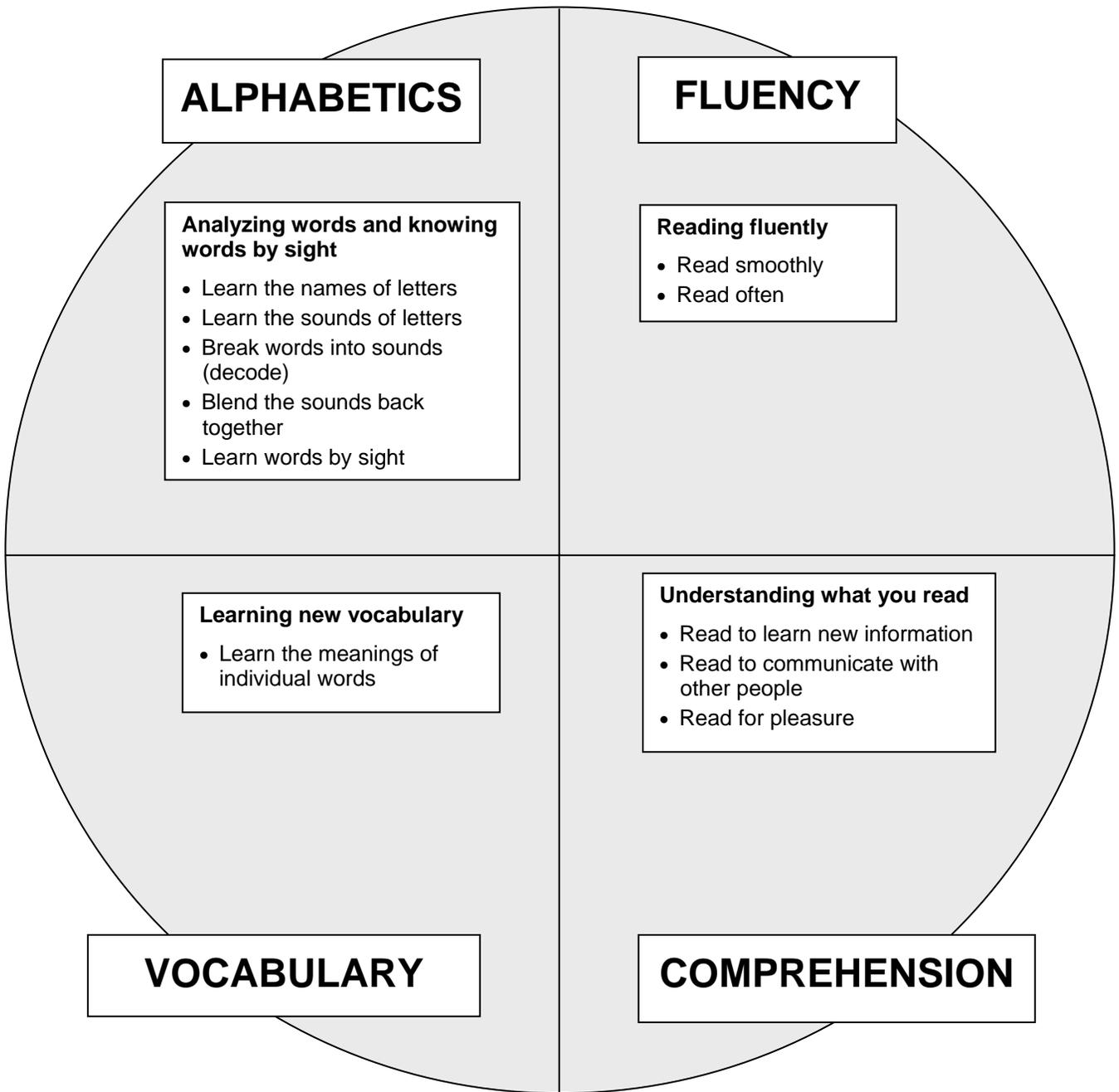
Reading comprehension is understanding a text that is read, or the process of "constructing meaning" from a text.

- Comprehension is a "construction process" because it involves all of the elements of the reading process working together to come up with what a text means.

- Readers interact with and become engaged in a text as ideas from the text are combined with their own prior knowledge or experience.

From *Research–Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction: A Guide to the Research for Reading Professionals.* (2001). Washington: DC: National Institute for Literacy, Partnership for Reading. Available at:
http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/partnershipforreading/adult_reading/intro/practices_topa.html

Components of Reading

ALPHABETICS

Analyzing words and knowing words by sight

- Learn the names of letters
- Learn the sounds of letters
- Break words into sounds (decode)
- Blend the sounds back together
- Learn words by sight

FLUENCY

Reading fluently

- Read smoothly
- Read often

Learning new vocabulary

- Learn the meanings of individual words

Understanding what you read

- Read to learn new information
- Read to communicate with other people
- Read for pleasure

VOCABULARY

COMPREHENSION

Research–based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction: Executive Summary

John Kruidenier

Published by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), 2002

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Reading Research Working Group (RRWG), a panel of experts on adult reading research and practice, was established by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) in collaboration with the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). It is part of the Institute's efforts to provide educators, parents, and others with access to scientifically based reading research, including research-based tools for improving literacy programs and policies for children, youth, and adults, through the Partnership for Reading.

The purpose of the RRWG was to identify and evaluate existing research related to adult literacy reading instruction in order to provide the field with research-based products including principles and practices for practitioners. This document presents findings from an analysis of the adult basic education (ABE) reading instruction research base and is designed as a resource for practitioners and reading researchers. It focuses on *principles* that can be derived from the research and a research agenda for the future.

For the purposes of the RRWG, "adult reading instruction research" is defined as research related to reading instruction for low-literate adults, aged 16 and older, who are no longer being served in secondary education programs. This includes low-literate adults in community-based literacy centers, family literacy programs, prison literacy programs, workplace literacy programs, and two-year colleges. It includes research related to all low-literate adults in these settings, including adults in ASE (Adult Secondary Education) programs, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programs, and adults with a learning or reading disability.

EVALUATING THE RESEARCH

Two recent reports were influential in guiding the work of the RRWG: *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* from the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences and *Report of the*

National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read. The guidelines used for selecting and evaluating ABE reading instruction research are based on those developed by the National Reading Panel (NRP) in their review of research related to reading instruction with children (National Reading Panel, 2000a). For the NRP review, major topics for study were established, studies were located through a literature search, and studies were evaluated using a set of "evidence-based methodological standards."

The RRWG made several modifications to the approach used by the NRP. Important modifications included the addition of topics especially important to adult reading professionals, the inclusion of studies related to the assessment of reading ability, and the inclusion of non-experimental studies as well as those involving the use of control groups.

Like the NRP, the major topics selected for study by the RRWG are those components of reading found by the National Research Council and others to be crucial during reading instruction: alphabetics (phonemic awareness and word analysis), fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The ultimate goal in reading is *comprehension.* Readers read a text in order to understand and use the ideas and information contained in it. Comprehension is improved when readers understand the key concepts or *vocabulary* in a text. Reading comprehension may suffer, however, when readers are unable to recognize individual words in a text. A reader may be conceptually ready to understand a text, for example, but will not have the opportunity to do so if he or she cannot read the individual words. To read individual words, the reader must know how the letters in our alphabet are used to represent spoken words (*alphabetics*).This includes knowing how words are made up of smaller sounds (*phonemic awareness*), and how letters and combinations of letters are used to represent these sounds (*phonics* and *word analysis*). The ability to figure out how to read individual words, however, is not sufficient. Readers must also be able to rapidly recognize strings of words as they read phrases, sentences and longer text. *Fluent reading* is crucial to adequate comprehension.

Effective reading and reading instruction cannot occur without sufficient motivation. Motivation is one of the additional topics selected by the RRWG for study, along with others that are especially important for adult reading instruction: computer technology, reading assessment, program goals and setting (family literacy, workplace literacy, and general functional literacy), instructional methods (strategies, material, teacher preparation, and the intensity and duration of instruction), and

specific characteristics of learners that affect instruction (reading level, whether English is their first language, the existence of a learning disability, and motivation).

USE OF K–12 RESEARCH

One task for the RRWG was to identify gaps in the ABE reading research and to consider how these gaps might be addressed. What research is needed and, of more immediate concern, where should the ABE instructor look for suggestions on the best ways to teach reading to ABE learners when the ABE research has not yet addressed a topic? One strong recommendation from the RRWG was to look to the NRP results for K–12 (elementary and secondary school) students, selecting those approaches to reading instruction that were likely to work with adult learners. To do this, the RRWG established criteria for evaluating the application of K–12 reading research to adult reading instruction. These criteria take into account the existing ABE research, the important differences between children and adults, and the strengths and weaknesses of K–12 research in each of the topic areas. NRP findings were used to help fill gaps in the ABE reading instruction research, to provide support when K–12 and ABE research were compatible, or to signal caution when they were contradictory.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH REVIEW

Most of the principles derived from the ABE reading instruction research are "emerging principles" because they are based on a relatively small body of experimental research. There is much more research focusing on children, as demonstrated in the report of the National Reading Panel. The small size of the ABE reading instruction research base precludes establishing more than just a few principles based solidly on large numbers of research studies that have been replicated. Some of the topic areas reviewed contain no or very few research studies. This does not necessarily suggest that the quality of ABE reading instruction research is poorer than K–12 reading instruction research or other bodies of research, only that there is less of it.

Approximately 70 qualifying research studies were identified in the literature search based on the criteria used. From the results reported in these studies, eighteen emerging research-based principles and related practices for ABE reading instruction were identified, along with thirty-two additional trends in the ABE research. Twenty-two specific ideas that might be used to supplement the ABE research were derived from the K-12 research. Emerging *principles* were based on findings from at least two experimental studies (including quasi-experimental studies)

and any number of non-experimental studies. Findings based on fewer than two experimental studies were labeled *trends* rather than principles.

Findings from the adult reading instruction research show that adults can have difficulties with any of the crucial aspects of reading: alphabetics (phonemic awareness and word analysis), fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension. It is important to assess adult students' abilities in each of these areas in order to identify what they already know as well as what they need to work on during instruction. Assessment for instructional purposes is one the first tasks a teacher performs. One emerging principle in the ABE research suggests that assessing each component of reading in order to generate profiles of students' reading ability gives teachers much more instructionally relevant information than any test of a single component can.

Some of the strongest ABE reading instruction research has to do with the assessment of adults' phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness among adult non-readers is almost non-existent and is only a little better among adult beginning readers. Adult beginning readers also have poor phonics or word analysis knowledge. Their sight word knowledge (the ability to recognize words on sight without having to sound them out) may initially be better than expected. Research evidence indicates that adults can be taught word analysis skills within ABE programs and, though the evidence is not as strong, that non-disabled readers can be taught phonemic awareness. Trends in the research suggest that phonemic awareness does not develop as easily among adults with a reading disability.

Teaching alphabetics leads to improved achievement in other aspects of reading. This emerging principle in the adult research is supported by research conducted with children. Research at the K–12 level, unlike ABE research, has identified specific practices that can be used to teach alphabetics. Many of these K–12 practices address topics that are especially important for ABE learners. No research was found related to the alphabetics ability of learners in ESOL adult basic education programs (programs that teach English to speakers of other languages).

There is very little research that reports results from the assessment of ABE students' fluency and vocabulary. We do know that young adults with poor fluency have an average silent reading rate that is much slower than that of normal readers. Emerging principles in the ABE research indicate that fluency can be taught to adults who qualify for ABE programs, that teaching fluency leads to increases in reading achievement, and that one specific technique can be used to help adults

develop their reading fluency. This technique, repeated readings of a text, is also supported by a much larger body of research with children.

The one trend related to the assessment of ABE readers' vocabulary suggests that their vocabulary knowledge is dependent on reading ability. Although, as might be expected, their life experience can give them an advantage as they begin to learn to read (their vocabulary knowledge is much better than their knowledge of alphabetics), this advantage may disappear at higher reading levels. An important trend from the instruction research, supported by research with children, is that contexts that are more interesting or engaging, such as workplace or family contexts for adults, may be especially useful for vocabulary instruction.

Reading comprehension is the ultimate goal for reading. A large-scale national survey of adult literacy provides information about adults' reading comprehension that is more reliable than the information we have about their fluency and vocabulary. Results from this survey indicate that most ABE learners have difficulty integrating and synthesizing information from any but the simplest texts. Although it is likely that poor phonemic awareness, word analysis, fluency, and vocabulary contribute to poor reading comprehension, it is also likely that most ABE adults will need to be taught specific comprehension strategies. Those adults with a learning disability and those whose first language is not English are especially at risk. Although there are more principles and trends related to ABE reading comprehension instruction than for alphabetics, fluency, or vocabulary instruction, the research does not address issues related to these adults.

Three important emerging principles from the ABE reading research suggest that participation in an ABE program can lead to increased reading comprehension achievement, that explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies is effective, and that teaching comprehension along with instruction in other components of reading is also an effective way to improve reading comprehension. The effectiveness of reading comprehension strategy instruction is supported by extensive research with children. In addition, K–12 research has identified eight specific strategies that may be of use to adult educators and also finds that instruction in other aspects of reading can lead to improved comprehension.

Trends in the ABE reading comprehension research also address several issues that are important to adult literacy students and teachers. Although more research is needed, these trends suggest that

comprehension can be improved in most ABE settings, including workplace and family literacy settings; use of adult-oriented content material is an effective way to help improve comprehension; and, dealing briefly but directly with issues related to motivation and how adults feel about their reading can have a positive effect.

In general, the review of ABE reading instruction research found that much more research is needed in almost all of the topic areas addressed. Of the existing research, assessment research is the strongest. Emerging principles suggest that reading can improve in ABE settings, that direct or explicit instruction in various components is effective, and that computer-assisted instruction can improve achievement in some aspects of reading. Basic information about the reading ability of ABE learners is known and fairly sophisticated methods for obtaining assessment information and using it for instruction have been developed. Much more information is needed about ESOL learners and adults with reading disabilities. More information about specific teaching strategies is also needed. With the exception of fluency, specific teaching strategies validated by the research are just beginning to emerge. Also beginning to emerge are findings of special significance for adult educators related to adult-oriented settings and contexts, and issues of motivation and the feelings that result from continued failure in learning to read.

While K-12 research does not address these more adult-oriented issues with the same urgency, the much larger body of reading instruction research conducted with children is compatible with the ABE reading instruction research, offering both support for many ABE findings and specific suggestions for instruction in areas where the ABE research is thin.

Quick Summaries of the Reading Research

ALPHABETICS

Alphabetics Assessment: Quick Summary of the Research

A strong body of research indicates that adult non-readers and those just beginning to learn to read have difficulty with alphabetics. Phonemic awareness (PA) among adult non-readers is almost non-existent and is only a little better among adult beginning readers. Nevertheless, PA does seem to improve as reading ability improves.

For programs that have beginning readers and that plan to teach PA, it is important to assess students' PA ability in order to identify PA skills that they may already possess as well as those they may need to work on. Assessment will also provide a benchmark against which teachers and learners can measure learner progress in the acquisition of PA.

For the same reasons, adult beginning readers' word analysis ability should also be assessed, including, at least, phonics and sight word knowledge. Beginning adult readers, like children who are just beginning to read, have poor phonics knowledge, although their sight word knowledge may, on average, be better than children's. Teachers need to be aware of this strength in sight word knowledge as they teach phonics. During phonics instruction, they should avoid using words that adults may already know as sight words. Simple, low-frequency words and nonsense words might be used instead to ensure that students are using their phonics knowledge, not their sight word knowledge, during phonics instruction.

No research was found related to the alphabetics ability of learners in ESOL adult basic education programs. Trends in the research related to learners with a reading disability (such as dyslexia) suggest that what is true for non-disabled readers may not be true for reading disabled, beginning adult readers. These readers have a great deal of difficulty developing phonemic awareness, and may need special PA instruction, or instruction that does not rely solely on oral PA instruction.

In general, trends suggest that instructors should pay special attention to adult beginning readers' PA. While there may be no critical age after which PA will not develop (younger as well as older adults can

develop PA), it may develop more slowly in adult beginning readers than in children.

Alphabetics Instruction: Quick Summary of the Research

There is research evidence indicating that adults can be taught word analysis skills within ABE programs, and additional evidence, though this evidence is not as strong, that adults in ABE programs can be taught phonemic awareness. In addition, when alphabetics is a significant part of instruction for adult beginning readers, their reading achievement may increase. These findings from the ABE research are supported by a much more extensive body of research conducted with children who are just beginning to learn to read. In addition, K–12 research, unlike ABE research, has identified specific practices that can be used to teach alphabetics (both phonemic awareness and word analysis). These K–12 practices address topics that are especially important for ABE learners: the setting within which instruction takes place; specific teaching strategies and instructional materials; the size of instructional groups; how long alphabetics instruction should last; and, how to work with students at different ability levels.

Most K–12 research does not directly address whether instruction can be effective within important ABE settings: workplace literacy programs, family literacy programs, and general functional literacy programs. Research with children does find, however, that systematic phonics instruction is effective with children at all SES levels. This provides indirect support for the belief that systematic phonics will work with adults from low SES settings, who make up the majority of those in ABE classrooms.

Specific teaching techniques found to be very effective with children could be tried with adults, especially since ABE research has not yet provided teachers with a broad array of techniques. ABE teachers who borrow techniques from K–12 research findings will need to keep in mind the *important differences between elementary school and ABE learners:* instructional materials that children find engaging are not necessarily engaging for adults; adults' goals and experience are very different from children's; most adults cannot spend the same amount of time on reading instruction that children in an elementary school setting can.

What are the most effective alphabetics teaching strategies at the K–12 level that can be tried with adults? For phonemic awareness (PA), the most effective strategies focus on teaching a few specific skills, especially blending (how to put individual phonemes or sounds together

to form words) and segmenting (how to break a word into its individual phonemes). For word analysis (phonics and sight word recognition), effective strategies systematically teach letter-sound correspondences directly and explicitly. They focus on teaching students how to convert individual graphemes (letters and letter combinations) into phonemes and then blend them together to form a word. Or, they focus on converting larger letter combinations such as common spelling patterns (e.g., *as, ing, able, un*) as well as individual graphemes.

K–12 research clearly finds that teaching PA and word analysis in isolation is not the most effective approach to reading instruction. First of all, PA and word analysis should be taught together. PA instruction is most effective when letters, not just sounds, are used for instruction, and this occurs during phonics instruction. Second, word analysis is improved through PA and fluency instruction.

K–12 research also demonstrates that computers can be useful in teaching PA, and that just about any group configuration during instruction will work, although small groups may be more effective than either individual tutoring or classroom instruction. PA training is most effective for those just beginning to read (those reading below GE 1) and for non-disabled readers. Those reading at higher levels and those with a reading disability can also benefit, but more research is needed with these students to identify the most effective approaches, at both the K–12 and adult levels. As noted in the section on alphabetics assessment, it may be especially difficult for disabled adult readers to learn PA.

FLUENCY

Fluency Assessment: Quick Summary of the Research

There is very little research that reports results from the assessment of ABE students' fluency. We know from one large-scale assessment of over one thousand young adults that those with poor fluency have a silent reading rate of about 145 words per minute or slower. This is much slower than the reading rates of average and above average readers. Another study suggests that adult beginning readers' fluency is similar to that of children who are just beginning to read.

Results from both studies suggest that it is important for teachers to assess adult readers fluency. Also, because oral reading, not silent reading, is one of the most important methods used to teach fluency, completion of assessment studies of ABE students' oral reading fluency (accuracy and rate) should be a priority.

Fluency Instruction: Quick Summary of the Research

Two emerging principles for fluency instruction were identified, and no trends. Several studies suggest that fluency can be taught to adults who qualify for ABE programs, and that teaching fluency may lead to increases in reading achievement. The teaching strategies used in these studies include practice in repeated oral reading of text; text units of various sizes are read repeatedly to improve reading speed and accuracy. Text includes longer passages, paragraphs, phrases, words, and parts of words such as syllables.

Teaching strategies that instructors can use to improve their students' reading fluency have been the subject of much more research with children than with adults. Results from the NRP review of K–12 research support the major findings from the ABE fluency research; fluency can be taught and teaching fluency leads to increased reading achievement, especially reading comprehension. In addition, K–12 results indicate that fluency instruction is useful for students with reading problems through the 12th grade, not just for beginning readers. The teaching strategy found most effective for children was guided and repeated oral reading of passages of text, similar to approaches found to be effective with adults. This is a fairly simple teaching strategy. Students read a passage multiple times while a teacher provides assistance, including information about rate and accuracy levels, help with difficult words, or modeling.

Fluency instruction that focuses on smaller units of text, such as individual letters, parts of words, or word lists, is not addressed in the NRP review of fluency research, although systematic phonics instruction was found to improve reading fluency. Of special importance for ABE teachers, perhaps, is the potential that fluency instruction may have as a motivational tool. Its effects for children are immediate. They experience improvement in their fluency on the texts used for instruction right away.

VOCABULARY

Vocabulary Assessment: Quick Summary of the Research

There is very little research that reports results from the assessment of adult basic education (ABE) students' vocabulary knowledge. One trend from the research literature suggests that teachers should give special attention to ABE learners' vocabulary assessment. This research compared the oral vocabulary knowledge of children and adults who had word recognition scores between GE 3 to 5. Even though adults have more life experience than children, their vocabulary knowledge appears

to be no better on average than children's by the time both are able to read (decode) text written at about the fifth grade level (GE 5).

Vocabulary Instruction: Quick Summary of the Research

No emerging principles and very few trends for vocabulary instruction were identified in the ABE research. Does participation in ABE increase students' vocabulary achievement? Overall, results from the research are inconclusive: several studies found that participating students' vocabulary knowledge improved, but several also found no improvement.

While no overall principles or trends were found, trends related to some vocabulary topics did emerge. These topics included goals and setting, teaching strategies, and duration of instruction. Initial research suggests that reading vocabulary can be improved in general functional literacy settings, although teaching vocabulary in a specific setting, such as a family literacy or workplace setting, may be more effective.

One study described a specific approach to teaching vocabulary to ABE students. Vocabulary instruction included content-specific listening comprehension exercises and the use of student generated reading material based on these exercises. This approach was combined with phonics instruction, however, so it was not possible to determine how much the vocabulary instruction itself was responsible for increases in reading vocabulary. Initial research also suggests that the longer ABE students remain in effective programs, the more their vocabulary will improve.

More research is needed before any teaching practices emerge that are related to learner characteristics, specific instructional material, and the effects of teacher training. Two of these topics, learner characteristics and instructional material, are addressed by vocabulary instruction research with children. The NRP review of K–12 vocabulary instruction also addresses topics related to goals and setting and specific teaching strategies. Overall, the NRP review of K–12 vocabulary instruction research did not produce findings that are as strong as those related to alphabetics and fluency. So suggestions for vocabulary instruction at the ABE level derived from K–12 research are not as strong either.

One trend from the NRP review supports a finding from the ABE research. Contexts that are more interesting or engaging, such as workplace or family contexts for adults, may be useful for vocabulary instruction. Additional trends from K–12 research that may be of particular interest to adult educators include those having to do with the

importance of repetition in vocabulary instruction, and the suggestion that restructuring vocabulary tasks may be especially useful for at-risk learners. Restructuring is done to help students understand what they need to do when reading and learning new words.

COMPREHENSION

Comprehension Assessment: Quick Summary of the Research

A recent, large-scale study of adults' reading comprehension (the National Adult Literacy Assessment, or NALS) provides information about adults' reading comprehension that is more reliable than the information we have about adults' fluency and vocabulary. Results from the NALS indicate that most ABE learners will have difficulty integrating and synthesizing information from any but the simplest texts. It is important for instructors to assess their ABE learners' ability to acquire and use information from text in order to prepare for instruction and to measure progress.

Trends in the research suggest that instructors should assess their adult learners' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies. It is likely that most ABE adults will need to be taught specific comprehension strategies, such as how to monitor their understanding of a text as they read. Some research suggests that results from comprehension assessment may vary quite a bit depending on the test used and when it is administered, so instructors need to choose comprehension tests carefully.

The NALS also gives us some information about ABE adults with learning disabilities and those in ESOL programs. Reading comprehension assessment is important for both of these groups. Adults whose first language is not English or adults with a learning disability are more likely to have reading comprehension deficits. Assessment should also be used to help determine whether any secondary issues related to any reading comprehension difficulties need to be addressed. For adults in ESOL programs, knowledge of the English language will be an issue. For adults with a reading disability, problems with enabling skills such as alphabetics or fluency may be an issue.

Comprehension Instruction: Quick Summary of the Research

There are more principles and trends related to ABE reading comprehension instruction than for alphabetics, fluency, or vocabulary instruction. Like the research in these other areas, however, research related to reading comprehension does not address issues related to most

of the learner characteristics subtopics (the reading level, ESOL, and learning disabilities subtopics).

Quite a few studies have measured adult learners' reading comprehension in order to determine whether it is better after participation in an ABE program. One of the three emerging principles derived from ABE reading comprehension research suggests that placing adults in ABE programs can lead to improved reading comprehension, although specific instructional practices that lead to improvement are only beginning to be identified.

Trends from studies that identify a programs' instructional goals or setting suggest that reading comprehension can be improved within workplace, family, and general functional literacy settings. Furthermore, participation in workplace and family literacy programs might lead to better reading comprehension achievement than participation in general functional literacy programs.

What specific instructional methods and materials result in improved reading comprehension for adult learners? Although much more research is needed, several studies point to some very general approaches that may be effective. These include approaches that provide direct as opposed to incidental instruction in comprehension strategies, approaches that focus on more than one aspect of reading, and enabling settings or approaches.

One emerging principle suggests that direct instruction in comprehension strategies is effective. Another, based on several studies with positive results, suggests teaching comprehension along with instruction in other reading components.

In some ABE instructional settings, reading comprehension has been improved by manipulating the classroom environment. Some enabling factors in the classroom environment suggested by trends in the ABE research are: including more learner-centered activities; providing assistance to teachers in the classroom with volunteers or paid assistants; and, dealing explicitly with issues related to adults' motivation and how they feel about their reading.

Results from comprehension instruction studies at the K–12 level support the ABE principles and some of the trends. The NRP review found strong support for the direct instruction of specific comprehension strategies. At the K–12 level, several specific strategies were found to be effective: question answering, question asking, summary writing, comprehension monitoring, use of graphic and semantic organizers, use

of story structure, and cooperative learning (where students work together while learning strategies). The use of an approach that focuses on several components of reading is also supported by very strong evidence from research at the K–12 level. The NRP review of K–12 research found that alphabetics instruction, fluency instruction, and vocabulary instruction all lead to increased reading comprehension achievement.

In addition to the individual comprehension strategies mentioned above, the NRP also found that teaching the use of multiple strategies was an effective approach. Students' reading comprehension improves when they learn how to flexibly apply combinations of the strategies listed above.

Some of the K–12 research addresses the issue of reading level, or how effective various approaches to teaching reading comprehension are with learners at different ability levels. Learning about the structure of stories and then using this knowledge to understand them is a strategy that works best with poor readers. Those in the seventh grade and higher, and good readers in the lower grades, benefit most from multiple strategy instruction.

One additional topic addressed by the K–12 research that may be of interest to adult educators is teacher preparation. A relatively small set of studies examined by the NRP suggests that teachers can learn how to teach reading comprehension to students and that their students can become aware of comprehension strategies, use them, and improve their reading. Although this is encouraging, the NRP also notes that even experienced teachers may have trouble implementing strategy instruction. This may be especially important for ABE settings, where teachers are frequently less experienced than their counterparts at the K–12 level.

From NIFL's Web site:
http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/adult_reading/adult_reading.html

Synopsis of Instructional Models*

Skills-Driven Model: In this model, teachers focus heavily on the skills needed to accurately and automatically recognize letters and words. They see these skills not only as crucial but primary, in that they must be mastered before comprehension can take place.

> *Decoding takes selective attention when it is unfamiliar or not fully mastered. And comprehension also requires attention. So, it is necessary to practice decoding skills to the point of mastery before the process of comprehension—the real goal of reading—is possible.*

Comprehension-Driven Model: In this model, teachers believe meaning, or comprehension, is the driving force of the reading process. Because this process involves cyclical cognitive strategy use and synergistic relations between the language cuing systems, learners must always be dealing with whole texts that are read for authentic purposes.

> *Readers bring all of their experiences and background knowledge to the reading task. They expect meaning from print and they coordinate various language cue systems to get at that meaning….comprehension is not dependent on linear, accurate, automatic decoding and letter-word recognition.*

Integrated Model: In this model, teachers first involve students in purposeful (to the student) reading and writing, then pull out some skills—ranging from decoding to text structure and comprehension—for focused work.

> *Readers read by focusing on comprehension and letter features roughly at the same time…meaning and syntactic context influence perception and recognition of letters and words.*

? *Which model best represents how you <u>remember learning to read</u>?*

? *Which model best represents how you <u>currently teach reading</u>?*

? *Which model best reflects how you would <u>like to teach reading</u>?*

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*From "There's Reading…and Then There's Reading" by Victoria Purcell–Gates, *Focus on Basics*, Vol. 1, Issue B.

Quantitative and Qualitative Research

As we start to read Research-based Principles for Adult Basic Reading Instruction, you may want a reminder of the major categories of research. As a refresher…

In the field of reading, there is no consensus about which model of reading is best. Therefore, we need different types of research to understand how people learn to read.

<u>To understand better the effectiveness of a particular model of reading instruction on</u> improving specific reading skills, large-scale research measures reading outcomes. This type of research is typically <u>quantitative</u>; "things" (such as test scores) are counted to understand what works for many students.

Quantitative research attempts to:

- explain reality with facts.

- show cause and effect.

- predict what will happen under certain circumstances.

Examples of quantitative methods are experiments and surveys with a predetermined set of questions. Quantitative research often uses statistical methods to draw conclusions about a large population from a smaller sample, but it may not provide all the answers about why a particular method does or doesn't work with specific students.

<u>To understand better what people do with reading in their daily lives</u>, smaller-scale research looks at people's motivations to read and the different contexts in which they read. This type of research is typically <u>qualitative</u>; people are interviewed and their stories and life experiences observed and recorded for an in-depth understanding of what works with specific individuals and communities.

Qualitative research attempts to:

- understand reality from the point of view of the participants in the study.

- understand the complexity of a situation.

- develop theories about a problem.

Examples of qualitative methods include case studies, observations, and interviews. Qualitative research provides a great deal of information, but does not usually lead to conclusions that can be generalized to a larger population.

Participants' To–Do Form

Session	Date	What to Do Before Session
One		Read the documents and articles you received in the Pre-Meeting Packet. Highlight interesting points and jot down any questions that come to mind.
Two		*You will receive these readings during Session One.* Readings Assigned for Session Two: • **Definitions of Key Terms and Acronyms** – Use for reference. • **Techniques for Teaching Beginning-Level Reading to Adults** – Read the entire six-page article. • **EFF Hot Topics: Read with Understanding** – Read the entire 16-page article. • **Lessons from Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children for Adult Learning and Literacy** – Skim the entire article. Then read the three-page case history of Richard. • Excerpts from **Literacy for Life: Adult Learners, New Practices** – Read the entire 10-page excerpt. • **Taking Literacy Skills Home.** Read the entire three-page article. Think about how the concepts presented in each reading might apply to the adult learners with whom you work.

Participants' To–Do Form (continued)

Session	Date	What to Do Before Session
Three		*You will receive these readings during Session Two.* Reading Assigned for Session Three: • **Adult Reading Component Study (ARCS): NCSALL Research Brief** – Read the entire three-page article. • **The Relationship of the Component Skills of Reading to Performance on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS): NCSALL Research Brief** – Read the entire four-page article. • **Assessment Strategies and Reading Profiles (introduction to the ARCS Web site)** – Read the entire four-page article. • **Introduction to** *Understanding What Reading Is All About* **Teaching Materials** – Read the Introduction. Skim the two-page outline. • **Selections from the Adult Reading Toolkit: Fluency, Vocabulary, Decoding, Comprehension** – Skim through all pages; read the pages on the reading component you are most interested to learn more about or address in your instruction. Jot down your impressions and questions as you read these sections. Review any notes you have (or have been typed up from group discussions) from the previous sessions. Spend time reflecting on the specific teaching strategies suggested by the research, and begin to think of what you might like to do next in your classroom or program to implement what you have learned.