

Study Circle Guide:

Research-based Adult Reading Instruction

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National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

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ABOUT STUDY CIRCLES

Who created this study circle?

This study circle was created by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). The study circle is part of NCSALL's efforts to help connect research and practice in the field of adult basic education and adult literacy. The Research-based Adult Reading Instruction Study Circle is one of a series of study circles that NCSALL has developed.

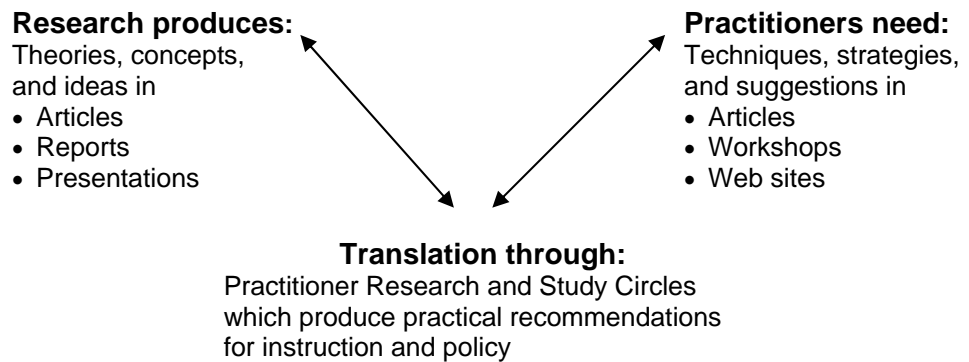
Why was this study circle created?

The purpose of all the study circles is to help staff developers and practitioners organize and conduct professional development that helps practitioners read, discuss, and use research to improve their practice.

The goal of NCSALL is to improve the quality of practice in adult education through research (both university-based and practitioner research). We want to ensure that practitioners—teachers, counselors, program administrators, and others—have an opportunity to access, understand, judge, and use research in their work. Therefore, the goal of the NCSALL study circles is to help adult basic education practitioners, in a small group setting, learn about research findings, theories, and concepts from NCSALL's research and discuss how these can be applied to practice and policy in adult education.

When we have talked to practitioners in the field of adult literacy about research, they ask for techniques, strategies, and practical suggestions that they can use immediately. Yet, research often produces reports, articles, and other documents that provide primarily theories, concepts, ideas, and sometimes implications for practice. NCSALL feels that there should be a process that “translates” research findings into practical suggestions and that practitioners should be involved in that process. The prime vehicles for translating research into practical suggestions for practitioners are professional development activities such as practitioner research training and study circles, where practitioners

can learn about, discuss, and/or try out ideas from research. The following diagram depicts this process:



What are study circles?

Study circles are professional development activities for practitioners (teachers, tutors, counselors, support staff, and program administrators) in programs that provide adult students with adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) education services. Each study circle uses a similar format, depicted in the chart below:

Session 1

Participants will:

- Learn what a study circle is and is not
- Think about their own experience related to the topic
- Discuss the research they have read

Session 2

Participants will:

- Discuss the research they have read
- Judge relevance of research to their own work
- Discuss strategies that they can use in their class or program

Session 3

Participants will:

- Discuss strategies they can use
- Make an individual plan to try out strategies
- Discuss supports and barriers to change
- Make a group plan for next steps

What should the outcomes of this study circle be?

First and foremost, we hope that practitioners learn more about what the research says about reading instruction and come away with ideas and an individual plan of action for how to apply what they've learned in their own classrooms and programs.

Secondly, we hope that the group is able to create a plan for the further work or contribution of the group itself. The group might decide in the last session to have a follow-up meeting, to stay in touch and share ideas via e-mail, or to produce a summary of what they've learned—something practical—that can be shared with other practitioners or policymakers, such as:

- A list of strategies or practical suggestions that follow from the research findings and that can be shared with other practitioners in the state or program
- A list of policy changes at the program or state level that follow the research findings

If each individual participant leaves the group with a plan of action for him/herself, and the group leaves with a plan for its further development or the development of others, the study circle is a success.

Who should participate?

The study circles are designed for any practitioners who work in adult basic education programs: teachers, program directors, counselors, volunteers, and others. Most of the study circles deal with topics that are broad enough to be of interest to ABE, ASE, and ESOL practitioners in a variety of delivery settings: community-based organizations, local educational authorities, libraries, correctional facilities, etc. The design of the study circle and the readings should be appropriate for both new and experienced practitioners; however, some of the readings have acronyms that may need to be reviewed with participants.

The study circles are designed for approximately 8 to 12 participants. We don't recommend running a study circle with

fewer than 5 or more than 15 people, as discussions are harder to facilitate with too few or too many participants.

How long is the study circle?

This study circle is designed for 10½ hours, divided into three sessions of 3½ hours each. We recommend that the sessions be scheduled no more than two weeks apart; if they are scheduled once a month, participants tend to lose the thread of the discussion and forget what they have read. If they are only one week apart, participants may not be provided with enough time to complete the readings between sessions.

If participants want follow-up meetings after the last session, they can set those up during the last session.

How do I recruit participants?

NCSALL has produced a sample flyer that provides information about this NCSALL study circle, which you can find on page 7. The flyer presents an overview of the topic and a brief description about what will be covered in each of the sessions. It also includes a registration form for practitioners to mail back to you.

You are welcome to use the flyer to send out via mail or on a Web site to let practitioners know when and where the study circle will be taking place. Or, you can create your own flyer, using the NCSALL flyer as an example.

How do I select dates for the study circle?

Select all three dates for the three sessions at the very beginning and advertise them in the recruitment flyer. Only people who can make all three dates will, in all likelihood, sign up to attend the study circle.

In general, it is best to have the three dates regularized (e.g., all on Tuesday nights or all on Friday mornings), as someone who is free at a certain time of week is more likely to have that same time free every week.

How do I organize the first session?

When you feel that you have solid commitments from the number of participants you are seeking, contact them to confirm their participation in the study circle. At this time, reconfirm the times, dates, and location of the study circle with the participants.

As mentioned above, the study circles have been designed for a group of practitioners to meet over three sessions, with each session lasting 3½ hours. Because three sessions' worth of time is such a limited period for a group to meet, we suggest that several short readings and a brief cover letter with information about the study circle be sent to practitioners to read before the first meeting.

After confirming their participation, send each participant the packet of information and materials to read before the first meeting (Pre-Meeting Packet of readings and handouts on pages 21–50). Participants need to receive this packet at least 10 days before the first meeting of the study circle.

You, as the facilitator, will also want to read over the packet so that you are ready for the first session and for questions that participants may have.

Be sure that you arrive early for each session in order to set up the chairs in a circle; arrange your newsprint(s); and organize handouts, pens, tape, etc. It's nice to have some sort of refreshment, such as juice, coffee, or water. Check out where the restrooms are so you can tell participants where they are located, and make sure the heating or cooling in the room is appropriate.

Always bring at least two or three extra copies of the readings for participants who forget to bring their own. You may also want to have (or start compiling during the meeting) a list of participants and their telephone numbers or e-mail addresses so participants can contact one another during the course of the study circle.

What kind of support can I expect?

For advice on facilitating a study circle, please review the "Tips for Facilitating a Study Circle" included at the back of this guide,

starting on page 247. These readings are from the Study Circles Resource Center in Pomfret, Connecticut, an expert resource in conducting study circles. We thank them for their guidance in facilitating study circles.

If you want to discuss the study circle beforehand with someone from NCSALL, we'd be happy to do so. We can be reached at:

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We'd love to hear how it went so that we can improve this and other study circles we produce in the future. We welcome your feedback about how this NCSALL study circle guide worked and how it could be improved. Contact us (telephone, e-mail, or letter) and tell us how it went and what you'd do differently next time.

(SAMPLE FLYER)

**Interested in learning what the research says
about how to teach reading to adults?**

**Study Circle
on
Research-
based Adult
Reading
Instruction**

Questions about what research says about teaching adults how to read are particularly relevant as programs and teachers struggle with choosing the most effective ways to develop adults' reading skills. [insert name of your organization] is sponsoring a study circle to engage ABE, ASE, and ESOL practitioners in discussing theories and concepts related to reading instruction.

In this study circle, you will read short articles on reading research. You, together with 7 to 11 other practitioners, will meet three times to:

- Discuss the research on reading instruction for adults and what it means for reading instruction.
- Consider how you might apply the research in your own classroom or program.
- Make a plan for trying a new research-based strategy for improving reading instruction.

The study circle is organized into three sessions of 3½ hours each. You will be asked to read four to five short articles before each session for discussion during the study circle. All readings will be provided by the facilitator of the study circle. We ask that you attend all three sessions.

Session One: Think about and share your own perspective on teaching reading, and discuss the research on reading with other participants.

Session Two: Look more in-depth at the reading research, who adult readers are, and how reading research can be applied to reading instruction.

Session Three: Identify how to assess adults' reading skills and what adult students should know about the reading process. Develop an action plan for using what you have learned in your own classroom or program, identify supports and barriers to change, and develop an action plan as a group.

The study circle is a staff development activity. Continuing Education Credits (CEUs) or Professional Development Points (PDPs) may be available.

The dates and locations of the three study circle sessions are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____ (snow date if applicable)

If you would like to join the study circle, please complete this form and send it to: [insert facilitator's name], [insert facilitator's address] by [insert deadline]. I can also be reached at [insert facilitator's phone number] and [insert facilitator's email].

Name: _____ Position: _____
 Home address: _____
 Home telephone: _____ Work telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

ABOUT THE RESEARCH–BASED ADULT READING INSTRUCTION STUDY CIRCLE GUIDE

What is a study circle guide?

This guide includes all of the information and materials you will need to conduct the study circle, including:

- A page listing the preparations you need to make before the session. This includes the newsprints to be made, the handouts and readings to photocopy, and the materials to bring.
- A step-by-step guide to the activities for the session and the approximate time for each activity, as well as facilitator notes and other ideas for conducting the activities. Handouts and readings, ready for photocopying, are included at the end of each session.

The only reading that is not included is the book produced by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), *Research-based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction*, which can be ordered in paper copy from NIFL or downloaded from the NIFL Web site at www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/adult_ed_02.pdf.




Each session includes discussions of the readings and how ideas generated from the readings can be applied to the program contexts of group members. The direction of the discussions will vary with the concerns of each group. It is important that discussions and activities meet the needs of all the group members. As the facilitator, you need to be flexible and may need to modify some activities to fit the needs and learning styles of study circle participants. This study circle guide should be used as a *guide*, not a rigid script.

How is this guide organized?

There are four main sections in this guide:

1. The introduction *About Study Circles* and *About the Research-based Adult Reading Instruction Study Circle Guide*
2. *Steps for Facilitating the Research-based Adult Reading Instruction Study Circle*, which include:
 - *To Do Before Session One*
 - *Steps for Facilitating Session One, Handouts for Session One, and Readings Assigned for Session Two*
 - *Steps for Facilitating Session Two, Handouts for Session Two, and Readings Assigned for Session Three*
 - *Steps for Facilitating Session Three and Handouts for Session Three*

The steps include how-to instructions for conducting all the activities in each session and:

- the newsprints that need to be prepared beforehand, denoted by the icon  and their titles are always indicated in the steps by being underlined
- the handouts that need to be photocopied beforehand, denoted by the icon  and their titles are always indicated in the steps by being *italicized*
- the readings to be photocopied and handed out to read before the next session, denoted by the icon  and their titles are always indicated in the steps by being **bolded**

All handouts for each session and readings for the following session can be found at the end of the “Steps for Facilitating...” that session. For example, the readings to be discussed in Session Two are provided at the end of the “Steps for Facilitating Session One.”

Every session includes an evaluation activity to conduct at the end to get feedback from the participants about what was useful and what could be improved.

At the end of each session, there is a “Quick Reference Sheet for Facilitating...” each session, which you can pull out of the notebook and take to the session as an easy reference guide for conducting each activity in that session. It looks like this:

Quick Reference Sheet for Facilitating Session One	
1. Welcome and Introductions	10mins., WHOLE GROUP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone introduces themselves. • Housekeeping and logistics. 	

3. *Note to Facilitator: Suggestions for Organizing a Follow-up Session*, which includes discussion activities and organizing strategies for conducting a follow-up session one month or more after the third and final session, IF participants decide they want to come back together.
4. *Tips for Facilitating a Study Circle*, which includes articles with helpful strategies for conducting a study circle from the Study Circles Resource Center.

What if I want to change the activities listed in the guide?

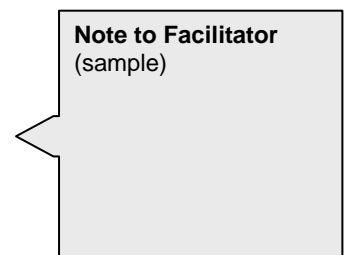
This guide is intended to help first-time facilitators who want a lot of guidance. It is, however, not intended to be a script that must be followed. If you have a different idea for how to do an activity, you should use it. To help you, throughout the steps, we have included the following features:

- **Another Idea** for several of the activities, which look like the sample at right when you see them in the steps
- **Note to Facilitator**, which look like the sample box at right when you see them in the steps
- **Questions** to prompt discussion are provided for you throughout the guide, and they look like this when you see them in the steps:

? *How would you...?*

Another Idea

(sample)



What's the focus of the *Research-based Adult Reading Instruction Study Circle*?

This 10½-hour NCSALL study circle is based on recent research and resources about adult reading instruction. The research and related resources include:

- A review of adult reading research conducted by a panel of experts called the Reading Research Working Group, published in a report by John Kruidenier entitled *Research-based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction*
- Two NCSALL studies on adults' reading profiles (their strengths and needs in the four components of reading)
- A study on adults' reading practices, and the classroom materials and activities that help them increase the type and amount of reading they do in daily life, by NCSALL's Victoria Purcell-Gates
- Resources to help teachers with reading instruction strategies, such as Equipped for the Future Hot Topics, the Adult Reading Component Study Web Site on assessment, and NCSALL Teaching Materials (*Understanding What Reading Is All About*)

How are the three sessions in this study circle organized?

In Session One, study circle members learn about different theories of the reading process and consider their own assumptions about reading. Participants discuss the studies that are included in *Research-based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction* and take part in an activity that introduces four major components of reading instruction: alphabeticity, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

The **objectives** for the first session state that, by the end of Session One, participants will be able to:

- Distinguish the different theories of the reading process and explain what model of reading they use in their own instruction.
- Summarize the types of research.
- Identify the components of reading.

The **main activities in Session One** include:

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Purpose and Overview of the Study Circle, Session One Objectives, and Agenda
3. Participant Expectations and Group Guidelines
4. Models of Reading: Where Do You Stand?
5. Types of Research
6. Introduction to the Components of Reading
7. Evaluation of Session One and Assignment for Session Two

In Session Two, participants review the main points raised in the readings about the four components of reading instruction and discuss the implications of these points for their own teaching. In the closing activity, participants focus on techniques for using these components in teaching reading to beginning- and intermediate-level readers.

The **objectives for the second session** state that, by the end of Session Two, participants will be able to:

- Name specific techniques to teach the components of reading instruction to beginning-level adult readers, and evaluate reading instruction through the framework of *Equipped for the Future*.
- Analyze who adults are as readers within a skills-based and a socio-cultural context.
- Summarize and judge what the research says about the effect of contextualized instruction on literacy practices in adults' everyday lives.

The **main activities in Session Two** include:

1. Welcome, Session Two Objectives, and Agenda
2. Using the Components of Reading Instruction to Teach Beginning- and Intermediate-Level Readers
3. Understanding Adults as Readers
4. Looking at Literacy Practices and Contextualized Instruction
5. Evaluation of Session Two and Assignment for Session Three

In Session Three, participants consider how viewing reading through different research lenses can give them a better understanding of adults as readers. Participants will discuss a resource for developing reading profiles of adult learners, and they will examine reading instruction through the Equipped for the Future framework. The group will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of introducing adult learners to the four components of reading instruction. Participants identify next steps for teaching reading to adults in their own programs and, as a group, discuss the factors that may hinder them in carrying out their plans as well as the supports that are available to help them.

The **objectives** for the third session state that, by the end of Session Three, participants will be able to:

- Explain the reasons and identify tools for assessing and profiling adult readers' skills.
- Utilize activities for introducing adult learners to the four components of reading instruction.
- Propose steps they will take next for teaching reading to adults.
- Analyze the supports and constraints they may face as they take steps to change how they teach reading to adults.
- Generate a plan for the group's next steps.

The **main activities in Session Three** include:

1. Welcome, Session Three Objectives, and Agenda
2. Assessing and Developing Reading Profiles of Adult Learners
3. Discuss Usefulness of the *Understanding What Reading Is All About* Teaching Materials
4. Making an Individual Plan of Action
5. Taking Next Steps: Supports and Constraints
6. A Plan for Our Group
7. Final Evaluation

