



READ LIKE A GEM

PLAYBOOK

THE SCIENCE AND ART OF READING

GEMS
EDUCATION



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“ Reading is the key that unlocks the doors to a world of knowledge, imagination, and endless possibilities. Through the power of words, students can journey to new realms, broaden their horizons, and ignite the spark of curiosity that fuels lifelong learning. ”

Lisa Crausby OBE
Chief Education Officer, GEMS Education

“ A love of reading isn't just about books—it's about discovering voices, cultures, and ideas that shape our understanding of the world and ourselves. ”

Niamh Allen
Corporate Head of Read Like a GEM
and Multilingualism, GEMS Education

Introduction

At GEMS, we believe that reading is the key to unlocking academic success and lifelong opportunities. Our ambition is for all students to become **fluent, confident** readers, equipped with the skills to navigate increasingly complex texts and engage with the world around them. Success in reading not only fosters academic achievement but also contributes to emotional well-being and personal growth.

Reading as well as shapes how students think, reason, and problem-solve, develops cognitive skills such as flexibility, memory, and metacognition. These skills are crucial not just for reading but for success across all subjects. Research shows that strong readers perform better in areas like mathematics, science, and the humanities, with studies such as the OECD's PISA linking reading ability to improved complex problem-solving.

In essence, reading is a cognitive tool that enhances learning and creativity. Proficient readers are better equipped to think critically, engage deeply with content, and tackle challenges from multiple perspectives. That's why prioritising reading skills, especially early on, is key to fostering lifelong learning and success.

Through a focus on developing fluency, comprehension, and a love for reading, GEMS students are empowered to acquire a **wide vocabulary, master key reading skills**, and develop **critical thinking abilities**. Our approach to reading is built on quality first teaching, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or needs, are supported in their journey to becoming motivated and proficient readers. By embedding reading across all subjects and encouraging a culture of reading for pleasure, GEMS fosters the development of communication skills and a passion for learning that will serve students throughout their lives.

The Read Like a GEM Playbook is part of the wider Education strategy and should be used by leaders and teachers in conjunction with the Teach like a GEM Playbook.

SECTION 1

INTENT OF THE PLAYBOOK

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAYBOOK

IMPACT OF THE PLAYBOOK



Intent of the Playbook

The *Read Like a GEM* playbook is an evidence-based framework designed to ensure that all GEMS students become **confident, proficient readers**. This strategy goes beyond discrete classroom teaching, embedding reading into the fabric of school life to foster a lifelong love of reading.

At its core, the playbook sets out a vision for a **world-class reading culture**, ensuring that reading is not just a subject but an integral part of every student's school experience. This culture is built on two key pillars:

A universal offer for all students:

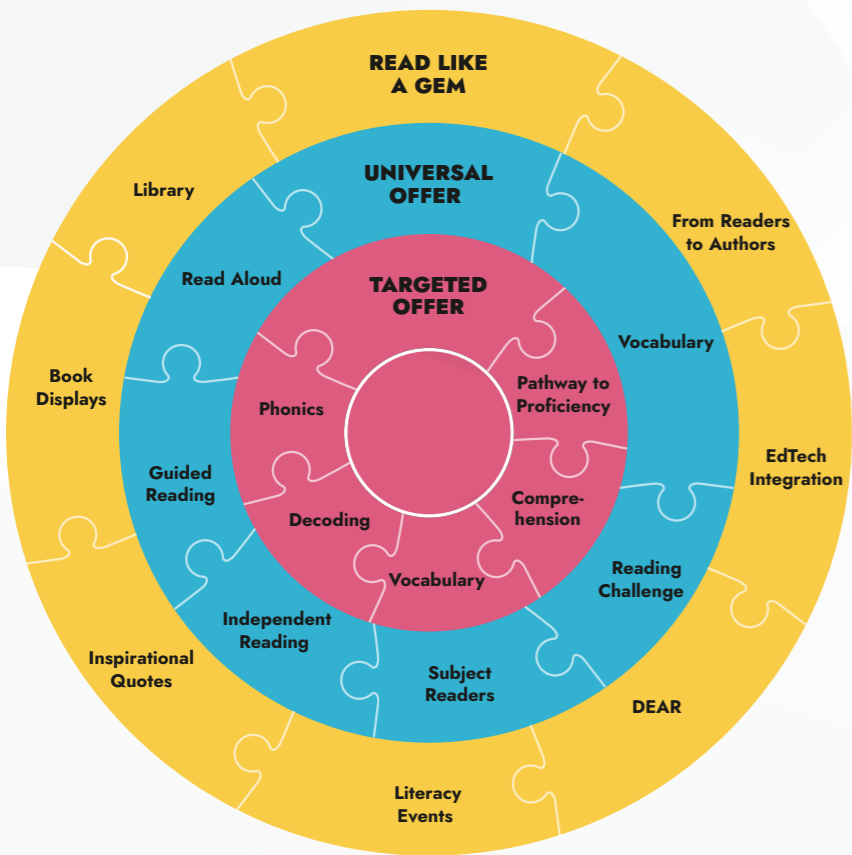
Reading is at the heart of school life, with a strong emphasis on **reading for pleasure** and **vocabulary** development. Research shows that students who enjoy reading “very much” are six times more likely to read above the expected level for their age compared to those who do not enjoy reading. Additionally, research suggests that students must understand **over 90% of words** in a text for “comfortable comprehension” (Daniel Willingham).

A targeted approach for students who need additional support:

Some students require structured intervention to close reading gaps quickly. The playbook outlines evidence-based strategies for quality first teaching and targeted support, ensuring that every student, regardless of their starting point, makes measurable progress and develops the skills and confidence to succeed as a reader.

By embedding these principles, the *Read Like a GEM* Playbook provides teachers with the tools to cultivate a **school-wide culture** where all students—no matter their starting point—become skilled, motivated, and independent readers.

Implementation of the Playbook



At GEMS, we believe in cultivating a **world-class reading culture** where literacy is celebrated, valued, and seamlessly woven into the fabric of school life. Successful implementation relies on the **daily integration of reading strategies** and a **school-wide commitment** to fostering a strong reading culture **The library serves as the beating heart of the school**, providing access to a wealth of resources that inspire both **reading for pleasure** and **academic growth**. We achieve this through our **Universal** and **Targeted Offer**

Universal Offer: Embedding Reading Across the School

These initiatives ensure that reading is prioritised for all students through engaging and structured opportunities:

GEMS Readers Catalogue – A carefully curated collection of books designed to engage, challenge, and inspire readers at every level.

GEMS Reading Challenge – A school-wide initiative to promote reading for pleasure, encouraging students to read widely and develop independent reading habits.

Read Alouds – Teachers model fluent reading, fostering a love of stories while developing students' comprehension, vocabulary, and cultural capital.

Vocabulary Programme (ReadingWise) – Explicit teaching of Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary to help students access and understand subject-specific content.

GEMS Subject Readers – Research-backed narratives that bring subject learning to life, helping students grasp complex concepts through engaging texts.

By integrating these strategies across all levels, we create a sustainable culture where all students—no matter their starting point—become skilled, motivated, and independent readers.

Targeted Offer: Closing Gaps in Reading

For students who require additional support, targeted interventions focus on closing gaps and ensuring all students can access the curriculum:

Early Readers and New to English: Phonics – Systematic phonics instruction to help early readers and New to English build foundational decoding skills.

Developing Readers Decoding Support – Explicit teaching of decoding strategies for students who struggle to read fluently, enabling them to access classroom materials with confidence.

Developing Readers Comprehension Support – Structured interventions for students who can decode but struggle with comprehension, ensuring they can extract meaning, infer, and engage with texts deeply.

New to English: Pathway to Proficiency—Bespoke pathways tailored to different levels of English language proficiency, designed to build students' confidence in communicating with peers and teachers, while supporting full access to the curriculum. In addition to this intensive support, students will have access to the **ReadingWise Zip Phonics Programme** and **Flashacademy** to further accelerate their learning, as well as **GEMS Universal Offer**.

Impact of the Playbook



The impact of **Read Like a GEM** will be measured through a rigorous, data-driven approach. All students will complete the **NGRT baseline assessment**, with **two re-assessment points throughout the year** to monitor progress, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and ensure continuous improvement. This systematic tracking enables targeted support, ensuring that all students make measurable gains in their reading proficiency.

ASSESSMENT WINDOWS

NGRT Form A 25 Aug 2025 – 17 Oct 2025

NGRT Form B 5 Jan 2026 – 13 Feb 2026

NGRT Form C 13 Apr 2026 – 29 May 2026

The NGRT will be used to systematically classify students into defined categories based on their assessment results. This data-driven approach ensures that each student receives targeted support and intervention, enabling accelerated progress and sustained reading development.

Category	Description	Readers	ReadingWise Programme
Category 1	All readers	· SAS 95-100	Vocabulary Universal
Category 2	Readers at risk of not being able to access the curriculum	· SAS 85-94 · RA: 1-2 years below chronological age	Comprehension Targeted
Category 3	Early readers	· Below SAS 85 · RA 3+years below chronological age · Students with severe cognitive and learning needs	Decoding Targeted
Category 4	Readers new to English	· International new arrivals	Phonics zip Targeted

The impact of this approach will be seen through **early identification** and **targeted interventions**, allowing us to **raise reading proficiency levels across GEMS**. By providing the **right support** at the **right time**, we will empower all students to become **confident, capable, and independent readers**, equipping them with the literacy skills needed to thrive academically and beyond.

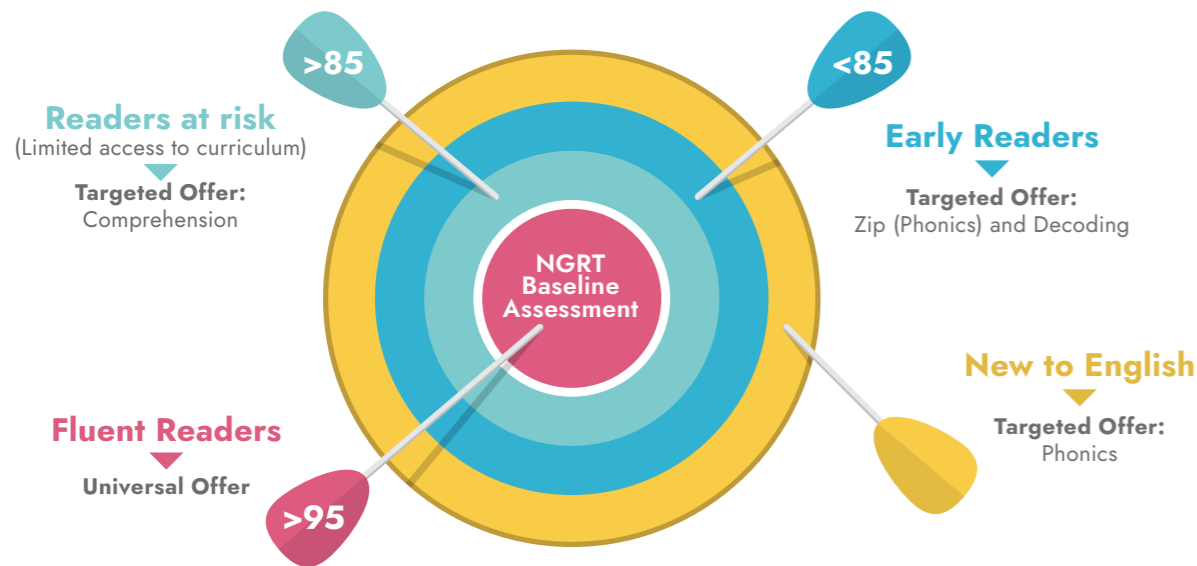
SECTION 2

ESTABLISHING A BASELINE WITH NGRT

Establishing a Baseline with NGRT

In Year 1 of the reading programme, the school establishes a secure baseline using the **National Group Reading Test (NGRT)** to assess students' reading abilities and identify any gaps.

All students from **Year 2/Grade 3 to Years 10/Grade 11** complete the test, allowing the school to categorise students into specific groups based on their Standard Age Scores (SAS) and determine the most suitable reading intervention programme. The categories are as follows:



To ensure accurate placement, the **Read like a GEM Lead** should triangulate multiple data sources, such as NGRT results, CAT verbal scores, and SAT reading scores. For some students, further targeted assessments, such as the Single Word Reading Test (SWRT), York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension (YARC), and **ReadingWise** assessments may be necessary, requiring collaboration between the **Read Like a GEM Champion** and the Head of Inclusion.

From Year 2 onwards, the new Year 2 intake is assessed alongside students in Years 3–11 who are already receiving reading interventions. It is essential that the **Read Like a GEM Champion** ensures optimal testing conditions for NGRT administration, providing clear instructions to students and confirming that all computers and testing equipment are fully operational.



The *Read like a GEM Playbook* works hand in hand with Teach Like A GEM – following **Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction**. A key factor for success is the ongoing professional development of teachers, ensuring they are equipped with the skills to explicitly teach decoding, reading fluency, comprehension strategies, and academic vocabulary. **Explicit instruction** in these areas is vital for improving student outcomes. A well-resourced and engaging reading environment, alongside regular incentives and opportunities for student leadership in reading activities, further motivates students. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement, where routines are consistently followed and reading is embedded throughout the curriculum, schools can sustain long-term success in developing confident, capable readers.

SECTION 3

UNIVERSAL OFFER



Universal Offer

At GEMS, we believe that reading for pleasure is the cornerstone of both academic success and personal development. Research highlights the profound impact that a habit of reading for pleasure has on a student's vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking. According to the National Literacy Trust (2020), students who engage in regular reading for enjoyment are more likely to

- » excel academically
- » develop stronger cognitive skills and
- » experience better emotional well-being

Clark (2011), in a large-scale survey of over 18,000 young people, reinforced this connection between **Reading for Pleasure** and **academic attainment** by finding that respondents who described themselves as enjoying reading 'very much' were six times more likely than those who did not enjoy reading to read above the expected level for their age.

Similarly, the OECD (2002) reports that Reading for Pleasure is "the single most important indicator of a child's future success". Research shows that when students are given tailored encouragement and appropriate resources, even those who struggle with reading can develop a love for it (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004).

The **GEMS Universal Offer** is built on **five essential pillars** designed to foster a culture of reading for pleasure and language development:

- » **GEMS Readers**
- » **GEMS Reading Challenge**
- » **GEMS Read Aloud**
- » **GEMS Subject Readers**
- » **Vocabulary Development – ReadingWise**

GEMS Readers

WHAT

GEMS Readers is a strategy to encourage students' sustained independent reading. Students in all year groups are encouraged to select and read 10 books each academic year from the GEMS Readers series. Students select these books themselves and read them at their own pace. On completion of 10 books, students receive a GEMS Reader certificate.

The **GEMS Readers initiative** provides a lists of recommended reading books across a number of genres and disciplines. The books are challenging, interesting and varied. They have been selected to give students windows into other people's worlds, promote discussion and build reading resilience.

The **GEMS Readers Catalogue** is the first publication in the GEMS Readers series. The catalogue sets out a list of recommended books (largely fiction) by year group. Students should be encouraged to read as many books as possible from their year group reading list. In order to encourage engagement in the initiative, schools should implement the GEMS Reading Challenge.

WHY

Reading for pleasure goes beyond academic achievement—it fosters creativity, personal growth, and lifelong learning. Studies show that when students read voluntarily, they gain a broader vocabulary, enhance their comprehension abilities, and improve their capacity for critical thinking (Sullivan & Brown, 2015).

The "Matthew Effect" (Stanovich, 1986) illustrates the compounding advantages of fluent readers, who continue to read more, thereby strengthening their reading ability. In contrast, students who do not engage in reading tend to fall further behind, widening the gap in reading proficiency over time. Reading for pleasure helps to mitigate this cycle, offering all students the opportunity to catch up and thrive.

HOW

- 1. Daily Reading Time** – Set aside dedicated time for independent reading, using books from the catalogue. Every school is required to purchase 3-5 copies of each title so that there is a selection available to students at any point in time.
- 2. Library as the Beating Heart of our schools:** all libraries are well-stocked with books of different genres and readily accessible to students. Students are inducted into the use of the library and have opportunities to take leadership responsibilities within it. Students are encouraged to recommend titles and authors. The library is used to provide reading enrichment opportunities (break, lunch and afterschool, visiting authors, book reviews etc).
- 3. Classroom Book Corners** – Ensure every classroom has a selection of books from the catalogue to encourage easy access.
- 4. Home-School Connection** – Share the catalogue with parents and provide recommendations for family reading.
- 5. Reading Champions** – Appoint student and teacher reading ambassadors to promote reading culture.
- 6. Teacher Modelling** – Encourage teachers to share their own reading habits and recommend books from the catalogue.
- 7. Diversity in Reading** – Showcase books that represent different cultures, identities, and experiences.
- 8. Personalised Reading Goals** – Support students in tracking their reading progress with books from the catalogue.
- 9. Oracy & Discussion** – Encourage book talks, debates, and presentations around chosen books.

GEMS Reading Challenge

WHAT

The GEMS Reading Challenge is an annual, school-based initiative designed to foster a love of reading and motivate students to engage with high-quality texts. Students are encouraged to read at least ten books from the recommended selections outlined in the GEMS Readers Catalogue.

To complete the Challenge, students must read ten books from their year group book list, and those who do so will be awarded a prestigious GEMS Reading Challenge certificate in recognition of their achievement.

However, we acknowledge that to truly cultivate a lifelong love of reading, student agency and choice are key. While the curated year group lists offer a helpful starting point, schools may adapt the challenge to allow students to choose any ten books that are suitable for their reading level, interests, and maturity. This flexibility ensures that all students are both inspired and appropriately challenged in their reading journey.

WHY

Implementing a **reading challenge** in schools brings a range of benefits that go beyond literacy skills. It fosters a **positive reading culture**, boosts **student motivation**, and enhances **academic success**.

Boosts Engagement – Makes reading enjoyable and goal-oriented, motivating students to read more, especially reluctant readers.

Builds Stamina & Fluency – Strengthens reading endurance, fluency, and confidence, reinforcing reading as a lifelong habit.

Expands Vocabulary & Comprehension – Exposes students to diverse texts, enhancing language skills, critical thinking, and broad knowledge.

Fosters a Reading Culture – Encourages book discussions, peer recommendations, and family involvement, creating a community of readers.

Supports Inclusivity & Personal Growth – Allows for personalised reading, promotes diversity, and nurtures empathy through exposure to different perspectives.

HOW

1. In order to ensure the Challenge is accessible to all, schools should purchase multiple copies of the GEMS Readers books for their library.
2. Schools should identify a Lead Senior Leader or Middle Leader to lead the Challenge and the wider GEMS Readers initiative.
3. INSET/training days should be used to generate whole school enthusiasm, engagement and ownership of the GEMS Readers initiative.
4. The GEMS Readers catalogues provide a visual representation of all books by year group. A digital copy of our GEMS Readers Catalogue will be shared with each student.
5. Schools must decide on a method for tracking participation in the Challenge. All students must be given a reading record that they use to track their own reading and participation in the GEMS Reading Challenge. A simple reading record is provided in the Toolkit. Schools should use the record to monitor engagement in the Challenge and reading beyond the GEMS Readers series (unless alternative reading records are already in operation at the school).
6. The GEMS Readers Checklists provide simple checklists of all books by year group so that students can keep a running list of all the books they have read. Schools should provide a copy of the relevant checklists to all students. Schools may also wish to include these checklists in student planners, parent handbooks etc.
7. Schools should ensure their GEMS Readers Challenge award ceremony is scheduled within the school calendar.

GEMS Read Aloud

WHAT

The GEMS Read Aloud Curriculum is a structured initiative which aims to build a strong reading culture by having students listen to fluent readers read books from the GEMS Readers series daily.

Primary: Daily read-aloud sessions.

Secondary: Read-aloud sessions take place at least three times a week, each lasting 20 minutes, incorporated into form or a timing which suits your school timetable.

Participation in this programme will enable students to not only hear fluent reading models but also **develop comprehension skills, expand their vocabulary, and build cultural capital.** By reading a further 7 books from the GEMS Readers series independently, a student will have completed 10 books and be eligible for a GEMS Readers' certificate.

WHY

Teachers are pivotal in cultivating a love for reading. By modelling reading as an enjoyable and valuable activity, teachers can inspire students to develop similar attitudes. In the **read-aloud sessions**, teachers bring books to life, through discussions where students share their thoughts and recommendations. GEMS Read-Aloud is an essential ingredient of GEMS book culture.

Boosts Reading Proficiency: Provides struggling readers access to more complex texts, improving comprehension, fluency, and confidence.

Closes Attainment Gaps: Ensures all students, especially disadvantaged learners, receive structured reading support, preventing gaps in achievement.

Fosters a Love for Reading: Engages students through shared literary experiences, increasing motivation and encouraging independent reading.

Enhances Cultural Capital: Exposes students to diverse perspectives, themes, and ideas through high-quality literature.

Supports Non-Fluent Readers: Group reading provides essential scaffolding, offering students—particularly those with limited literary exposure—regular access to rich texts.

Promotes Academic Success: Whole-class reading aloud combines structured support with quality texts, helping all students develop essential reading skills.

By the end of their schooling, every student will have encountered at least 12 books from the GEMS Readers series through read-aloud sessions, with opportunities to read additional books independently and earn recognition through the **GEMS Readers' Certificate.**

HOW

The Read Like a GEM Lead plays a crucial role in ensuring the success and sustainability of the Read Aloud programme. To ensure the effective and consistent delivery of the Read Aloud curriculum, the following structures and responsibilities need to be in place:

- 1. Structured Reading Schedule:** All teachers will follow a structured reading schedule to ensure that all books are completed within the designated timeframe. The [website \(www.readinglength.com/book/isbn-1539410382\)](http://www.readinglength.com/book/isbn-1539410382) can be used to check the time that would be required to read a book aloud. Fluent readers can be assumed to read 180 words per minute (assuming that they understand and are familiar with the text).

All students in a given year group will read the same book at the same time. This means that schools will need to purchase sufficient copies of each selected title so that every student has a copy for each GEMS Read-Aloud session. A few additional copies will be required of each text for the teachers / fluent students leading sessions (if students from older age groups will be reading to younger ones).
- 2. Consistency & Quality Assurance:** Read Aloud sessions must be delivered consistently across all form groups. Instructional coaching will be provided where needed to ensure high-quality implementation, including practice clinics focused on fluency, intonation, and engagement techniques
- 3. Book Leads in Each Form Group:** Each form group has a book lead who will distribute and collect books efficiently. maintain the Book Culture Notice Board, tracking progress and highlighting key literary elements (e.g., vocabulary, similes, metaphors). ensure absent students are updated on the storyline to maintain continuity.
- 4. Engaging Discussions & Reflection:** Students will be provided with opportunities for discussion and analysis to deepen comprehension and engagement. Book reviews and reflective activities will encourage critical thinking and personal connections with the texts.

GEMS Read Aloud Strategies

There are **7 strategies** to consider when implementing GEMS Read-Aloud. The rehearsal for Read-Aloud strategies should take place through practice clinics using the **See it, Name it, Do it** model. Each strategy should be introduced with a **'can do'** attitude in order to build confidence and make it an enjoyable experience for all.

Strategy 1: Expose students to complex texts

- Provide an enjoyable experience of a text that struggling readers are unable to read themselves from the GEMS Readers list.
- Expose students to complex sentence structures and vocabulary that can help to build background knowledge.
- Support students to become readers as writers.

Strategy 2: Develop syntactic control

- Track the connection of ideas.
- Enable students to hear the way the syntax of the sentence connects the ideas.
- Expose students to and help them become familiar with the artful syntax within the text.
- Show how a range of complex and nuanced syntax prepare students to incorporate different types of sentences in their own writing.
- Use examples in the text to develop the capacity to use forms of grammar to build sentences and construct ideas with fluidity and flexibility.

Strategy 3: Build vocabulary

- Use Read-Aloud to unlock the complexity of language.

- Set the stage for students to make better sense of the variety of syntaxes and structures that they will encounter when they read independently.

Strategy 4: Emphasise new genres and background knowledge

- Address background knowledge to put the text into context.

Strategy 5: Model fluent reading

- Model fluent reading.
- Model expression and encourage students to emulate it.
- Convey a passion for reading by adding drama. This will stop readers from zoning out.

Strategy 6: Highlight points of emphasis

- Pre-read the text in advance.
- Determine which words to emphasise and where to add emotion. This will allow more meaning to be conveyed to the students.

Strategy 7: Instil a love of literature

- Love and show an interest in the text. It is highly likely that the student will too.
- Choose the Read- Aloud book carefully. It will influence the student's choice of book.

GEMS Subject Readers

WHAT

GEMS Subject Readers provide opportunities for students to read books from different disciplines within each year group. This enables students to Read Like a **Geographer, Scientist, Linguist, Historian, Mathematician**, deepening their connection to subjects and improving comprehension, academic writing, and oral skills This approach deepens their connection to subjects while enhancing comprehension, academic writing, and oral skills. Books are carefully selected to cater to a wide range of reading abilities, from accessible series like *Horrible Geography* to more advanced texts like *Hawking's Unlocking the Universe*. These books are actively promoted in lessons and made available in the library.

WHY

Research shows that narratives improve memory and comprehension by aligning with the brain's cognitive processes (Willingham). Stories create connections, making information memorable and easier to retrieve. They engage multiple brain areas, enhance understanding, and foster curiosity, particularly in subjects like history, science, and literature.

HOW

1. Encourage reading across all subjects. Every department and the library should include subject-specific resources and supplementary reading lists to deepen understanding and engagement.
2. Teachers should model fluency and reading strategies in lessons, drawing attention to language features and providing opportunities for students to read aloud in a supportive, knowledge-driven environment.
3. Every department and the library should include subject-specific resources and reading lists to deepen understanding.

Vocabulary – ReadingWise

Vocabulary size is a key predictor of academic success, yet many students often enter school with a significantly smaller vocabulary. This **vocabulary gap** continues to widen unless explicitly addressed, making it harder for these students to access the curriculum and keep up with their peers. Without intervention, the gap can persist throughout schooling, affecting overall academic achievement and future opportunities.

To close this gap, GEMS is introducing **ReadingWise**, a ground-breaking literacy intervention programme that improves student's reading ages faster than usual classes.

Its structured vocabulary programme is designed to provide students with repeated exposure to key words, helping them retain and use vocabulary more effectively across all subjects. Students need both **breadth** (knowing many words) and **depth** (understanding and using them effectively), which requires

structured learning and multiple exposures in different contexts.

All students should access the vocabulary programme. This focuses on tier 2 and 3 vocabulary. It carefully scaffolds word lists and delivers sequenced, **spaced learning** to interrupt the forgetting curve and links closely to the vocabulary outlined in our 4 Curriculums at GEMS.

The programme recognises when students have mastered a word and moves it into a revision cycle. It also enables students to engage in activities that bolster their knowledge of word classes, definitions, synonyms and antonyms. As students' confidence increases, the scaffolding is gradually withdrawn.

All teachers engage with the vocabulary programme and input subject-specific vocabulary for students to practise as home as a homework activity.

HOW

The vocabulary module is completed independently by students at least **3 times per week** (at home or during social times). Each of the sessions lasts **10 minutes**. Incentives are provided to spur participation. For example,

- each form group has a weekly leader board for the student with the greatest participation.
- each year group has a half-termly leader board for the form group with the greatest participation
- the whole school has a termly leader board for the year group with the greatest participation.

Students receive rewards that promote the school's book culture.

Subject-specific tier 3 vocabulary can gradually be built into the vocabulary programme to match the sequencing of curriculum planning. This enables students to practise and secure the necessary disciplinary vocabulary needed to master the subject.

Vocab



- 3 sessions a week
- No more than 10 minutes per session
- Universal offer allocated across all year groups to all, except those unable to access the definition cards
- Half termly English and Multidisciplinary lists should be allocated
- Optional additional English text word lists available

SECTION 4

TARGETED OFFER



Targeted Offer

At GEMS, we are committed to providing tailored, strategic interventions to ensure that every student, regardless of their starting point, has the opportunity to thrive academically. The targeted reading interventions outlined in this section are specifically designed to support students at various stages of their literacy development, ranging from early decoding to advanced comprehension. These programmes are built upon research-based methodologies and best practices, ensuring that each student receives the appropriate level of support to progress at their individual pace.

As part of our targeted support, we have partnered with **ReadingWise**, a cutting-edge literacy intervention programme known for accelerating students' reading ages at a rate faster than traditional classroom instruction. **ReadingWise** employs a wide range of innovative techniques to enhance students' ability to read fluently and with strong comprehension. The online platform adapts to each student's current abilities, delivering personalised content that optimises learning and progression.

The **ReadingWise** programme consists of three key modules:

- **Zip (Phonics)**
- **Decoding**
- **Comprehension**

Each module is meticulously designed to address specific reading deficits and accelerate literacy development. These programmes are tailored to meet the unique needs of each student, ensuring rapid improvement in their reading skills.

For our **New to English** students, we recognise the importance of providing early, personalised support to help them succeed in both language acquisition and academic integration. Through the **100 Days of Success** onboarding programme, we ensure that every student is supported, engaged, and valued, with progress monitored closely from day one. This holistic approach fosters a strong sense of belonging, confidence, and success, laying the foundation for long-term academic achievement.

To ensure a strong home-school connection, parents will be informed when their child is selected for the Targeted Offer. This allows us to work in close partnership with families, creating a shared commitment to strengthening reading skills and ensuring every child thrives.

Support is monitored regularly, and adjustments are made based on student progress to ensure the approach remains responsive and effective.

TARGETED OFFER

Zip (Phonics)

Students at a very early reading stage receive the **phonics' programme**. The NGRT assessment is used as a baseline upon arrival. The assessment is repeated termly to check the impact of the intervention programme and address next steps to secure rapid improvements. It is important that the Read Like A GEM Lead works closely with the Head of Inclusion to regularly assess student progress in line with the SEND graduated approach. A minority of students may not respond to a phonics programme and may need an alternative approach.

Synthetic phonics lies at the heart of the decoding programme because this is a body of knowledge that is necessary for students to learn, read and spell.

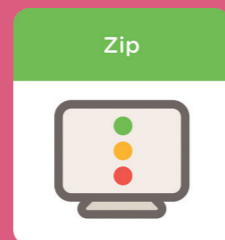
The English language has a complex alphabetic code, so it is important that students are taught explicitly the correspondences between letters and sounds (**graphemes and phonemes**), as well as the skill of blending the individual sounds together to read. The skill of segmenting words into their individual sounds is needed for spelling. Word reading and spelling are 'reversible processes.' Reading involves blending sounds to say a whole word; spelling involves segmenting a whole word to identify the sounds in it.

The phonics programme takes place online daily for 10 minutes over a 10-week period. This can take place during social times, before the start of the school day for example.

Students are also rewarded for independent learning at home. The programme is adaptive according to the ability of the student. It includes all phonics, part phonics and common words. They are introduced through a staged approach.

This programme can complement a teacher-led phonics' programmes such as Read, Write, Inc or UFLI.

Leaders may also introduce students to the decoding module as soon as they are ready to support rapid progress.



- Ideally daily sessions
- **No more than 5–10 minutes** per session
- **Zip phonics intervention** is for category 4 readers used alongside other new to
- English support offered by individual schools
- No other ReadingWise modules allocated initially

TARGETED OFFER

Decoding

It is expected that students at an early stage in their reading (for example: **SAS below 85** and/ or a sentence completion **stanine score of less than 6**) access a single word reading test using either GL Assessment's Single Word Reading Test (SWRT) or BURT SWRT (free and used widely)

If the SWRT score is 2 or more years below chronological age, then the student should be placed on the decoding module and their SWRT reading age added to the account which will inform a decoding programme of work bespoke to the needs of the student.

The decoding module takes place online three times per week for 20 minutes over a 10-week period. This is delivered by trained teachers or teaching assistants and overseen by the Head

of Inclusion using an individualised lesson plan based on the student's reading assessment. It includes:

- working through blends, progress through common endings, words and sentences using a variety of innovative approaches to unlock reading
- decoding with letter sound recognition that progresses to four-syllable words

When the decoding module is completed, the SWRT can be implemented again; impact recorded, and decisions made about students' next steps and whether a student will benefit from the comprehension module.

Decoding



- 3 sessions a week
- **No more than 20 minutes** per session
- **Decoding intervention** is for category 3 readers
- **Single word reading test (SWRT)** is used to confirm need for decoding input and the reading age is used to determine the lesson plan in the program

TARGETED OFFER

Comprehension

Students whose NGRT baseline suggests that they may be at risk of not being able to access the curriculum (for example: **SAS: 85- and a sentence completion stanine score above 6**) receive the **ReadingWise comprehension** programme. This is in addition to the vocabulary programme, which they will continue to follow.

For students receiving this programme, **the NGRT assessment is completed biannually** within the assessment windows.

It is expected that students who urgently require this support are allocated discrete reading intervention time. This is to enable the programme to run smoothly **three times a week for 30-45 minutes over a 10-week period**.

Trained teachers with support from teaching assistants (if available)

work with the class. They follow a lesson plan structure and use explicit instruction of comprehension strategies.

The programme uses three main components (mega-skills and mini-skills, classroom discussion and a recorded narrative) to engage students and build their skills and confidence.

Students work independently on computers (or iPads) for twenty minutes. They practise the mega skills and learn key strategies. They progress through the adventure narrative and come together as a group to discuss the new chapter for the remaining twenty-five minutes. This is an open discussion and an open opportunity for students to talk. Clear guidance is provided for the teacher through the session plan.

Comprehension



- Ideally 2 sessions a week
- 30–45 minutes per session
- Independent work followed by collaborative discussion
- Comprehension intervention is for category 2 readers
- Category 3 readers can move onto the Comprehension module post decoding and based on reading age data





TARGETED OFFER

New to English: GEMS of the World





Marhaba

A PERSONALISED WELCOME

Through our **GEMS of the World** programme, every child receives a **welcome video** and guidance about their journey at GEMS to foster a sense of belonging, ensuring that every student feels valued, supported, and ready to embark on their learning journey with GEMS.

At GEMS, we are committed to ensuring that our New to English students feel supported, valued, and empowered from the very beginning of their learning journey. We recognise that adjusting to a new language and school environment can be both exciting and challenging, which is why student wellbeing is at the heart of our approach.

A strong start is essential for both academic success and personal confidence. From day one, we focus on early identification of language proficiency to tailor support that meets each student's needs. Through robust assessment, targeted interventions, and an inclusive classroom environment, we create opportunities for students to develop their English skills while maintaining their sense of identity and belonging supported additionally through the **100 Days of Success** onboarding programme.

By providing structured language support, fostering a welcoming school culture, and encouraging meaningful peer interactions, we ensure that every student—regardless of their starting point—can thrive and fully participate in school life.



Yalla – The Journey Begins

We use **Flash Academy EAL Assessment** to accurately identify each student's English Language Proficiency. This **adaptive, digital assessment** measures English proficiency across the four key skills: **Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing**. It provides a grade from **A (New to English) to E (Fluent)** using the Department for Education's recommended bands. The assessment is marked using **AI** and is accessible via **PC, tablet, or smartphone**.

Why use it?

- Provides a **clear starting point** for supporting EAL learners
- Offers **consistent tracking** of progress over time
- Enables **targeted teaching** through linked strategies and frameworks
- Simplifies **reporting** with pupil data stored in one place
- Supports **whole-school planning** and evidencing attainment

HOW

- Assess students 3–4 times a year (on arrival and at the start of each term)
- Each test lasts approximately 20 to 45 minutes, depending on the student's level (adaptive format)
- Use the Teacher Dashboard to assign the test and view/confirm AI-marked results. Review individual skill scores and access tailored teaching strategies

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATION

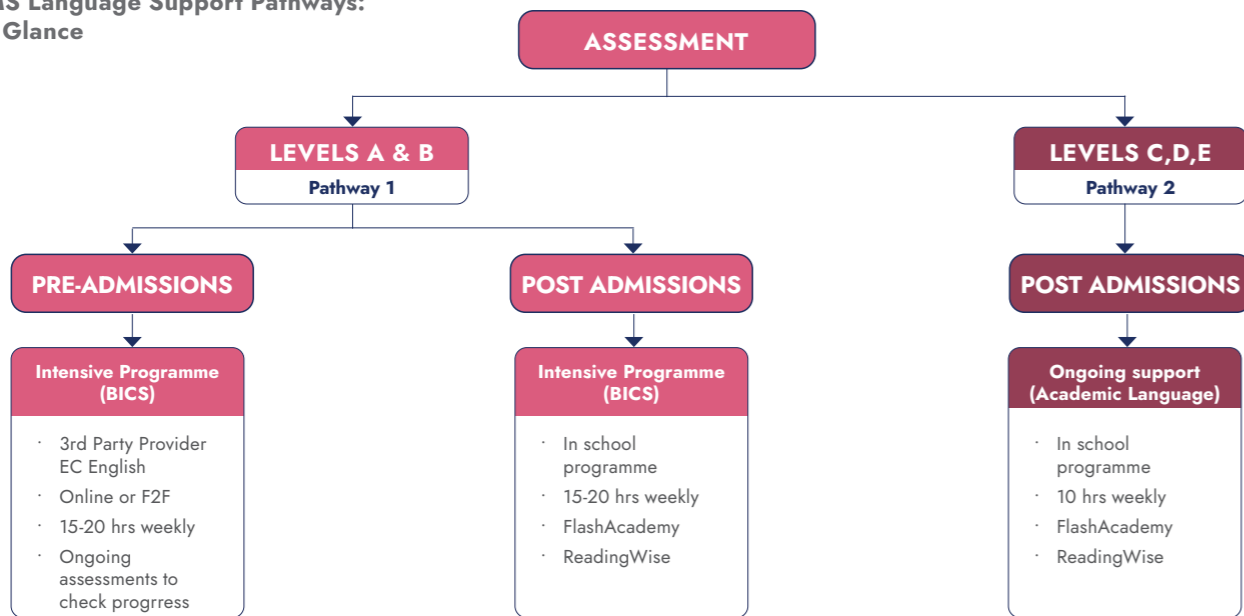
- Ensure access to a charged **PC, tablet, or smartphone** with audio functionality (headphones recommended)
- **Environment:**
 - » Quiet space, free from distractions
 - » Comfortable seating and sufficient lighting
 - » Ensure students have headphones
 - » Separate areas for multiple students if testing simultaneously
- **Supervision:**
 - » Have an adult available to support log-ins or troubleshoot technical issues
 - » No translation or reading support should be given during the test



PATHWAY TO PROFICIENCY: EMPOWERING STUDENTS FOR CURRICULUM SUCCESS

To ensure that every learner has the language foundation needed to access the curriculum confidently, we offer **two distinct pathways** for students new to English. Placement is guided by results from our AI-powered language assessment (Flash Academy) aligned with CEFR levels and academic readiness.

GEMS Language Support Pathways: At a Glance



Remember: Every interaction is a language opportunity. Be intentional. Be explicit. Be inclusive.

What is FlashAcademy®?

FlashAcademy® is a digital language learning app that helps multilingual learners build skills in **vocabulary, grammar, phonics, and survival language**. It supports **48 home languages**, making it inclusive and accessible.

After completing a **proficiency assessment**, students begin a **personalised learning journey** through a gamified, easy-to-use app that builds literacy and confidence. Learners can choose to learn in English or from their home language, helping them progress independently and access the curriculum more easily.

Students work independently or with teacher support on:

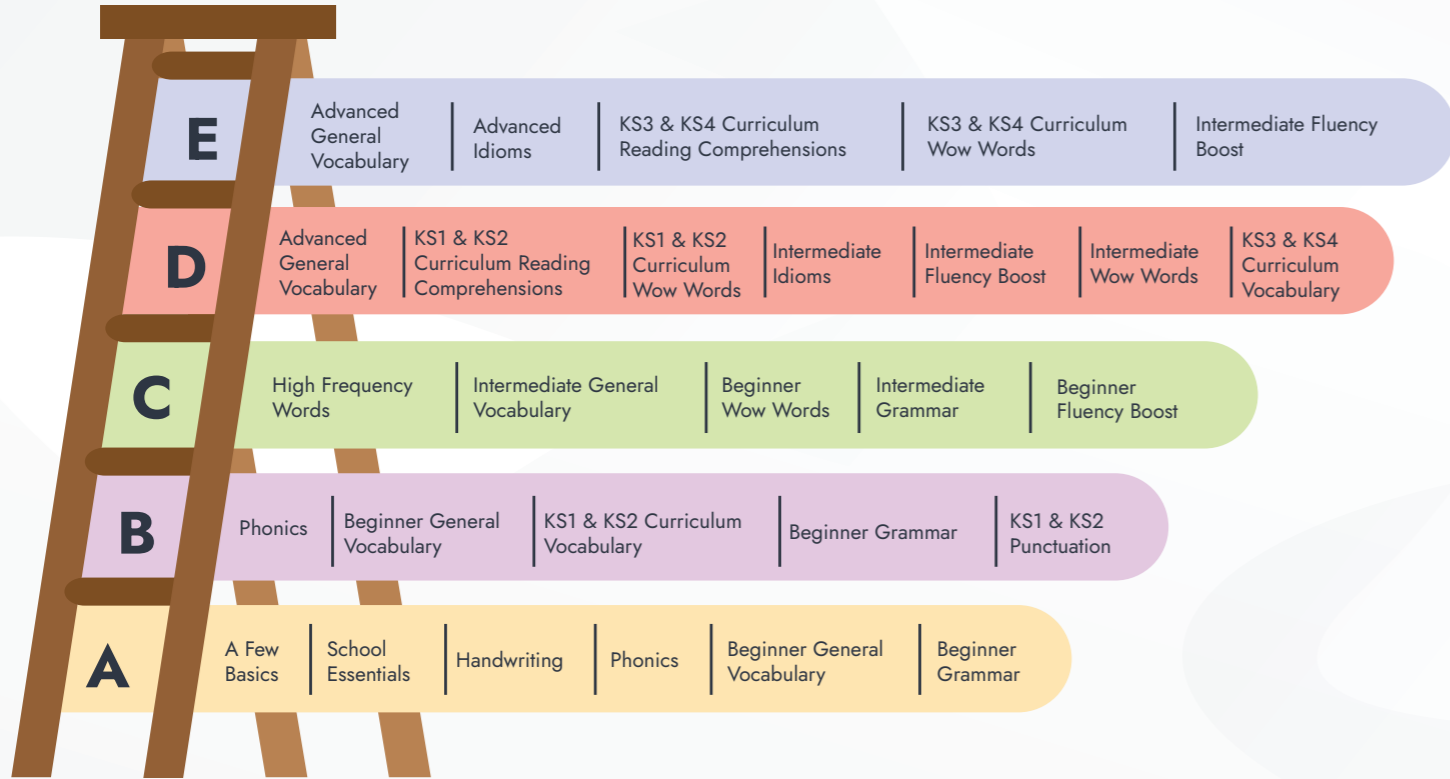
- **Tier 1, 2 and 3 vocabulary**
- **Pronunciation, spelling, handwriting, and grammar**
- **Survival language** for everyday school communication
- **Curriculum-linked vocabulary** to unlock access to subjects

The app supports a **“little and often” strategy**, recommending 10–20 minutes daily, both at school (e.g. form time, intervention groups) and at home.

HOW CAN IT HELP LEARNERS?

- Provides **targeted language support** for EAL learners at all proficiency levels
- Promotes **independent learning** through gamified activities and speech tools
- **Supports curriculum access** by pre-teaching key vocabulary and concepts
- **Builds learner confidence, fluency and motivation** through regular progress tracking and rewards

Content by Proficiency Band



HOW TO USE?

To ensure a **consistent and effective approach** across all language proficiency levels, the following principles underpin language support from Level A (New to English) through to Level E (Fluent):

A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 5 sessions a week 20 - 30 minutes per session Small group or 1:1 with teaching assistant or teacher Core vocabulary, survival language, phonics, high-frequency words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use L1 support and visual scaffolds Pre-teach key vocabulary for upcoming lessons Encourage use at home with parent resources in home language
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 5 sessions a week 15 - 20 minutes per session Independent use with some teacher check-ins Topic-specific vocabulary, sentence building, functional grammar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use bilingual prompts where needed Reinforce and extend vocabulary from lessons Promote independent practice with parent encouragement
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 5 sessions a week 15 - 20 minutes per session Independent use; support as needed Use for revision and pre-teaching new curriculum vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance access to texts and subject knowledge Optional extension to support fluency and confidence
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 3 sessions a week 15 - 20 minutes per session Group check-ins, language reviews, feedback on writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic vocabulary, grammar refinement, idioms Use to enrich topic understanding, for example, through writing tasks. Encourage students to use at home. Involve parents.
E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 1 - 2 sessions a week 15 minutes per session Encourage self-directed learning for gaps. Advanced vocabulary, exam preparation (for example, GCSE English support), cultural language nuances. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor for plateauing: Periodic check-ins using assessment data and classroom observation. Encourage students to use at home. Involve parents.



ACHIEVEMENT AND SUCCESS

This final stage marks a significant milestone in each student’s journey towards greater English proficiency, academic integration, and personal growth. Progress is measured termly and shared with parents, ensuring a transparent and collaborative approach to each learner’s development.

As part of our commitment to helping every New to English student settle in seamlessly, this stage is aligned with the **100 Days of Success** onboarding programme. This initiative is designed to build strong relationships with students and their families, ensuring they feel welcomed, supported, and fully connected to the GEMS community from day one.

The 100 Days of Success programme is designed to:

- Foster meaningful engagement with families and students.
- Provide regular touchpoints to monitor academic progress, ensure a smooth transition, and promptly address any emerging concerns.
- Recognise student achievements and progress, reinforcing a strong sense of belonging, motivation, and success.

Throughout the first 100 days, students work towards a series of key milestones, allowing for:

- Regular check-ins
- Feedback from families and teachers
- Tailored support to meet individual needs

At the end of the 100-day journey, students are formally recognised with a **certificate and celebratory moment**, honouring their growth and the strong connections built during this important transition period.

Through these four key stages, we ensure that every **New to English** student receives the personalised support, resources, and encouragement they need to **thrive linguistically, socially, and academically** within the GEMS learning community.

GEMS of the World

LANGUAGE WITH MEANING. LEARNING WITH PURPOSE.

Core Language Techniques

Say—Show—Go

Pause & Process

Expand It

Word Up!

Show what you know

Plan to shine!

Across our classrooms, multilingual learners bring a wealth of experience, identity, and potential. But to access that potential, we must make sure the language of learning is clear, visible, and inclusive—right from the start.

The GEMS of the World techniques are not extras. They are essential, non-negotiable practices that reduce cognitive load, increase clarity, and ensure every learner can thrive—regardless of their language background.

Each technique is simple, practical, and designed to make a difference immediately. When used consistently, they create classrooms where every learner understands, participates, and shines.

Say—Show—Go

WHAT

Say—Show—Go is the practice of delivering clear, simple instructions using consistent classroom language, paired with gestures, visual cues, and facial expressions to reinforce meaning. This multi-modal approach reduces cognitive load and supports all learners—particularly those New to English—in understanding expectations and routines quickly and confidently.

WHY

Language learners often experience cognitive overload when processing unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentence structures, or multi-step directions. When students hear it and see it, they're more likely to understand and remember it. It supports routines, builds independence, and helps everyone keep up—no matter their language level. This approach:

- Enhances comprehension
- Increases confidence and independence
- Reduces anxiety and miscommunication
- Supports routine-building and transitions
- Fosters a more inclusive, accessible classroom culture

HOW

Say It Simply

- Use short, consistent phrases for daily routines: “Line up”, “Eyes on me”, “Turn and talk”.
- Avoid idiomatic expressions or metaphors that may confuse learners.
- Repeat key phrases frequently until they become predictable classroom language.

Show It Clearly

- Use hand gestures, facial expressions, and body language to reinforce spoken instructions (e.g. miming “sit down” or pointing to the task).
- Display visual cues such as step-by-step icons, routines, or timers.
- Use real objects or photos when introducing new vocabulary or concepts.

Go With the Routine

- Embed Say—Show—Go in all transitions (lining up, handing in work, starting tasks).
- Use the same language—gesture—visual combo consistently to build automaticity and reduce the need for re-explanation.
- Encourage students to copy gestures or repeat visual steps to confirm

understanding.

Plan for Visual Anchoring

- Prepare visuals ahead of time: slides with icons (familiarise them with Teach Like a GEM icons, cue cards, or pictorial schedules).
- Introduce one routine or command at a time to avoid overload.
- Where possible, include home-language labels or equivalents.

Use ‘Silent Signals’

- Incorporate non-verbal cues for common commands (e.g. tapping the board = “look here”, raised hand = “stop and listen”).
- Reinforce them with consistent modelling so they become classroom norms.

Monitor and Adjust

- Watch for signs of misunderstanding (hesitation, copying peers, confusion).
- Re-model instructions with increased clarity or slower pacing.
- Praise students who follow non-verbal cues to reinforce success.

Pause and Process

WHAT

Pause & Process is the practice of giving students time to think and support to prepare their response before they speak. It uses structured routines and sentence scaffolds to help all learners—especially those learning English—take part confidently without feeling rushed.

WHY

Students learning in another language need extra time to:

- Understand the question
- Translate or organise their thoughts
- Find the words to express their ideas in English

Rushing them increases anxiety and reduces the quality of responses. Pause & Process lowers cognitive load and makes space for meaningful participation. This approach:

- Boosts comprehension and oral accuracy
- Encourages deeper thinking and extended answers
- Reduces anxiety and performance pressure
- Supports equity of voice in the classroom
- Builds confidence in verbal communication

HOW

Plan for Wait Time

- After asking a question, pause for 5–10 seconds to let students think
- Signal wait time with your hand or by silently counting in your head
- Avoid repeating or rephrasing too quickly—hold the space

Use Structured Routines

- Try Think—Pair—Share to give time for idea development with a partner
- Use Pose—Pause—Pounce—Bounce: Ask → Pause → Call on → Bounce to a peer for response-building
- Pair students intentionally so they can rehearse with someone they trust

Support Verbal Rehearsal

- Give students sentence starters like: “I think...” / “One reason is...” / “In my opinion...”
- Let students write or sketch their idea before they speak
- Celebrate attempts, not just perfection

Encourage Risk-Taking

- Normalise errors by responding positively to all efforts
- Reinforce that thinking time is part of good learning
- Praise students for using new words or trying full sentences

Expand It

WHAT

Expand It is the practice of helping students move beyond short, one-word answers by modelling full sentences, providing speaking frames, and scaffolding classroom talk. It gives multilingual learners the structure and confidence they need to express ideas clearly and participate in academic dialogue.

WHY

Students learning English often know the answer but don't have the words or sentence structures to say it well. One-word answers don't develop thinking, language, or confidence. Expand It helps students speak in full thoughts, using subject-specific language with support.

By providing structure and examples, this technique reduces cognitive load and supports language development. It helps students:

- Organise and extend their thinking aloud
- Build academic vocabulary and sentence structure
- Gain confidence speaking in front of others
- Participate more equally in discussion
- Improve clarity and precision in their responses

HOW

Model Full Answers

- Show what a short vs. stretched response sounds like: "Yes." → "Yes, because I noticed the liquid changed colour."
- Use I do – We do – You do to build talk routines gradually

Provide Speaking Frames

- Use sentence stems like: "I think... because..." "One reason is..." "This shows that..."
- Link stems to question types and thinking skills (e.g. explain, justify, compare)

Prompt for More : Ask follow-up questions like:

- "Can you add more detail?"
- "Can you use a keyword from the lesson?"
- "Can you say that in a full sentence?"

Use Talk Routines: Establish routines like:

- "Say it again but better"
- "Stretch your sentence"
- "Repeat it in a full sentence with your partner first"

Celebrate Full Answers

- Acknowledge when students take risks or use new sentence structures
- Encourage peers to build on each other's ideas ("I'd like to add...")

Keep Visual Support Handy

- Display speaking frames on walls or slides
- Give students laminated speaking mats for desks
- Highlight subject-specific sentence starters by topic

Word up!

WHAT

Word Up! is the practice of making academic vocabulary visible, accessible, and interactive. It involves using word walls, anchor charts, and bilingual glossaries that are actively referred to during lessons. These visual tools help all students—especially multilingual learners—learn and use key vocabulary with confidence.

WHY

When students are learning both new content and a new language, remembering and using academic vocabulary can be overwhelming. Without regular exposure and support, words get lost—and so does understanding.

Word Up! reduces cognitive load by keeping important language on display and reinforcing it through regular use. This approach:

- Strengthens vocabulary acquisition and word recall
- Bridges the gap between understanding and expression
- Supports reading, writing, speaking, and listening
- Encourages independence and boosts confidence
- Makes classrooms more language-rich and inclusive

HOW

Build a High-Impact Word Wall

- Include Tier 2 (general academic) and Tier 3 (subject-specific) words
- Add visuals, short definitions, and home-language translations where useful
- Organise by topic, subject, or learning phase—and keep it up to date

Create Anchor Charts That Stick

- Co-construct charts with students that show key terms, visuals, and usage examples
- Refer to charts during every lesson—especially during modelling and discussion
- Use colour, icons, and diagrams to help students connect ideas

Use It to Talk It!

- Point to the wall when prompting students in speech or writing
- Say: "Find a word you can use" or "What's a better word for that?"
- Challenge students to use at least one 'power word' in their response

Support with Glossaries and Word Banks

- Give students personalised glossaries or table-based word banks
- Allow learners to write new words in English and their home language
- Upload the word onto the ReadingWise vocab platform for practice
- Encourage independent use of bilingual dictionaries or translation apps

Celebrate Word Power

- Praise students for using precise or ambitious vocabulary
- Use exit slips, games, or mini whiteboards to reinforce new words
- Let students contribute new words to the wall and "teach" them to the class

Show what you know

WHAT

Show What You Know is the practice of using drawing, mini-whiteboards, and graphic organisers to help students show their thinking without relying only on words. It's a powerful way for multilingual learners to express understanding visually—especially when their spoken or written English is still developing.

WHY

When learners are still acquiring English, they may understand the content but struggle to explain it with words. Expecting verbal or written answers too quickly can increase anxiety and limit participation.

Show What You Know reduces cognitive load by offering low-pressure, visual ways for students to demonstrate what they're thinking. This approach:

- Makes thinking visible for real-time assessment
- Builds confidence in participation without language barriers
- Helps structure and organise ideas
- Encourages creativity and risk-taking
- Offers an inclusive entry point into classroom tasks

HOW

Use Mini-Whiteboards Regularly

- Ask students to sketch, label, or write quick responses during whole-class teaching
- Use for predictions, diagrams, vocabulary checks, or sentence building
- Use "Show Me" routines to check understanding quickly

Think Through Drawing

- Allow students to draw their ideas before explaining them
- Use drawing as a form of planning (e.g. mind maps, storyboards, annotated diagrams)
- Celebrate effort and message—not artistic quality

Embed Graphic Organisers

- Use Venn diagrams, flow charts, timelines, and sequencing strips
- Model how to use each one and link them to thinking tasks
- Pair with visuals or word banks to scaffold language use

Visual First, Words Second

- Encourage students to show their answer first (e.g. draw a food chain)
- Then support them to label, caption, or explain it in writing or speaking
- Use speaking frames to help turn pictures into full sentences

Make it Routine

- Use visual tools daily as part of your classroom rhythm
- Include visuals in assessments, plenaries, and reviews
- Encourage students to choose a visual tool that works for them

Plan to Shine

WHAT

Plan to Shine is the practice of working together across roles—classroom teachers, Multilingual leads, and support staff—to create lessons and routines that intentionally include and support multilingual learners. It's about planning with language in mind, right from the start.

WHY

Multilingual learners thrive when teachers plan with their language needs in mind, not as an afterthought. When classroom and multilingual teams work in isolation, support becomes inconsistent, and students can fall through the cracks.

Plan to Shine reduces cognitive overload and increases consistency by ensuring students experience joined-up strategies across subjects and teachers. This approach:

- Ensures multilingual strategies are embedded into everyday teaching
- Builds shared responsibility and expertise across the school
- Prevents duplication or contradiction between teachers and support staff
- Supports continuity and confidence for multilingual learners
- Raises the overall quality of teaching and learning

HOW

Co-Plan Lessons with Language in Mind

- Identify key language demands in the lesson (vocabulary, structures, talk opportunities)
- Agree where scaffolds like visuals, sentence frames, or word walls will be used
- Plan when and how multilingual learners can show understanding (verbally, visually, practically)

Use Shared Planning Tools

- Create or adapt planning templates that prompt language-focused thinking
- Use colour coding or icons to highlight scaffolds for new-to-English or emerging learners
- Link lesson objectives to both content and language outcomes

Define Who Does What

- Clarify the role of each adult in the room: who models, who supports, who checks understanding

- Decide how support staff will work with individuals or groups
- Ensure consistency across subjects and classrooms

Make Time for Professional Conversations

- Schedule regular short catch-ups between class teachers and EAL leads
- Use CPD or staff briefings to share practical strategies and success stories
- Encourage peer observations focused on multilingual support

Learn from Learners

- Reflect together on what's working for specific students
- Involve multilingual learners in giving feedback on scaffolds and routines
- Use student progress to refine future planning

SECTION 5

READING TECHNIQUES



Reading Techniques



Fluency: Reading with Ease, Understanding with Speed

- Short and unpredictable
- Placeholder
- Transaction Costs
- Prosody
- Bridging
- Spot Check



Comprehension: Turning Words into Knowledge and Understanding with Speed

- Limit text and gradually increase
- Skimming
- Focal Point
- Scanning
- Time Limits
- Zooming in and out
- Interactive Reading Tasks
- Confirm and scaffold comprehension



READING TECHNIQUES



Fluency

Reading with Ease, Understanding with Speed

Fluency is a key component of the Universal Offer, ensuring that all students develop the automaticity and confidence needed to engage with texts across the curriculum. Explicit instruction in fluency, alongside opportunities for guided and independent practice, enables students to read with accuracy, pace, and expression, supporting both comprehension and overall literacy development.

Fluency Techniques:

- » Short and unpredictable
- » Placeholder
- » Transaction Costs
- » Prosody
- » Bridging
- » Spot Check

Short and Unpredictable

WHAT

Short and Unpredictable reading refers to the practice of cold calling on students to read aloud brief sections of text, as part of a larger text being read in the lesson.

WHY

Short reading selections ensures that reading remains manageable, promoting sustained focus and encouraging continued participation throughout the session. Unpredictable reader selection (Cold Call) maintains interest, ensuring active participation and preventing disengagement.

HOW

- 1. Allocate Reading Selections:** Identify the entire text to be read aloud during the lesson and divide it into appropriate sub-sections, e.g., if there are five pages to be read aloud, break these into 8-12 sections to ensure that the reading is manageable and engaging for all students.
- 2. Plan Text Allocation Based on Skill Level:** Assign shorter, less complex passages to struggling readers, and longer, more challenging sections to more advanced readers. Annotate your teacher's copy with key points so that you can easily match the right reader to the right section.
- 3. Use consistent, practiced cues for transition:** Use verbal or non-verbal cues to transition between readers quickly and smoothly, e.g., when transitioning from one student to the next, you might hold up a hand or nod toward the student who will read next or say 'Thank you Abeer, Sophie please continue.'
- 4. Monitor students as they read aloud:** Ensure uninterrupted reading practice to build fluency while tracking areas for improvement. Observe pronunciation, intonation, pace, and volume, noting areas for later feedback without interrupting the reading process.

Transactional Costs

WHAT

Transactional costs refer to minimising the number of words used when transitioning between readers. This involves practising short, efficient transitions that take only a few seconds.

WHY

Minimising transactional costs and ensuring quick, clear transitions helps maintain the flow of reading, reducing interruptions and distractions, and supports comprehension making learning more efficient.

HOW

- 1. Use Consistent Language:** Use the same verbal / non-verbal cues every time to help students understand what's expected and reduce any hesitation during transitions.
- 2. Ensure a Quick Transition:** When transitioning between readers, limit verbal instructions to the minimum necessary to keep the flow smooth, e.g., Use hand signals, eye contact, or a slight pause to indicate to students when it's their turn to read.
- 3. Provide Positive Praise:** Recognise students when they respond promptly to transitions, reinforcing their engagement and active listening. This will encourage students to stay focused on the reading and to be ready for their part. E.g: After a smooth transition, offer feedback like, "Great job, Sarah! You followed along well as the next reader!" This reinforces active participation and ensures that students are not distracted during the process.

Bridging

WHAT

Bridging is when the teacher reads a brief segment between primary and secondary readers, focusing on more complex parts of the text. Repetition is used to emphasise key points, ensuring continuity and reinforcing understanding, while supporting student fluency and confidence

WHY

Bridging enhances fluency and comprehension by offering targeted teacher intervention at key moments. It reinforces key ideas, ensures continuity between readers, and models pacing and intonation, keeping students engaged and focused on the main themes.

HOW

- 1. Select Key Text Segments:** Identify sections that are either challenging for comprehension, where students may struggle with pacing or vocabulary, or crucial for highlighting key ideas or themes that enhance overall understanding
- 2. Model Fluency:** Plan how to read the selected segment fluently, with clear expression, proper pacing, and emphasis on key points, phrases or concepts to repeat for reinforcement.
- 3. Model Pacing:** Ensure your pacing allows for clear understanding. Slow down when necessary, especially when reading more complex or dense sections, and speed up in less important parts to maintain flow.
- 4. Repeat for Reinforcement:** Revisit key phrases or ideas multiple times for reinforcement. This helps students focus on important concepts and internalise them.
- 5. Encourage Mimicry:** After modelling, invite students to practise the segment with you, mimicking your pacing, expression, and emphasis. This provides opportunities for immediate feedback and improvement.
- 6. Time Management:** Plan how much time to spend on each bridging segment to maintain engagement without disrupting the overall reading flow.

Spot Check

WHAT

A spot check occurs when the teacher reads a segment of text and pauses at a key point, prompting students to complete the sentence aloud as a class.

WHY

Spot checks maintain engagement, ensure active participation, and provide immediate feedback. They reinforce comprehension, boost confidence, and help manage classroom dynamics by encouraging direct interaction with the text.

HOW

- 1. Select Key Text Segments:** Identify the sections of text where a pause will be most beneficial, usually at key points or where vocabulary can be reinforced.
- 2. Use a Consistent Cue:** Establish clear verbal / non-verbal cues, such as a click or a raised hand, to prompt students to complete the sentence.
- 3. Vary the Missing Word Position:** Occasionally omit key words from different parts of the sentence, not just the last word, to encourage deeper engagement with the text.
- 4. Encourage Pair Work:** Before completing the spot check aloud, allow students to whisper the missing word to a partner to build confidence.
- 5. Ensure 100% Participation:** Ensure all students are involved by having them say the word aloud together or by randomly selecting participants.
- 6. Follow-Up Questions:** Ask thematic questions (e.g., "Why did the author use this word?") to reinforce comprehension.

Placeholder

WHAT

A placeholder is a strategic pause in the reading process, used to create a smooth transition between different activities or to give the teacher an opportunity to ask a question.

WHY

Placeholders are essential because they ensure that reading sessions remain structured and organised. Placeholders pause reading at key moments, allowing the teacher to assess comprehension or ask questions without disrupting the flow. This predictable structure keeps students engaged, focused, and ensures a smooth transition back into the text.

HOW

- 1. Plan Pauses:** Identify key points in the text to pause for clarification, questioning, or discussion, ensuring students stay engaged.
- 2. Establish a Clear Placeholder:** Agree on a consistent cue with students to signal a pause and transition, e.g., use a command like "Hold your place, track me." to ensure a smooth response.
- 3. Ensure the placeholder is consistently used.** This will allow students to retain their place and allow them to immediately transition back to the text after the questioning /discussion, e.g., 'Finger freeze' , 'Finger in your book, close your book', 'Pen to page, hold your spot'
- 4. Clear Transition:** Transition back from questioning / discussion to reading could be facilitated by recognisable commands such as 'Pick up reading please, Abeer.' Or ' Let's read please, Sophie ."
- 5. Engage During Pauses:** Ask questions or prompt discussion to deepen comprehension, then smoothly transition students back to the text without losing their place.

Prosody

WHAT

Prosody is the ability to read with appropriate rhythm, intonation, and expression, enhancing comprehension and engagement.

WHY

Prosody is essential for fluent reading, as it helps convey meaning, emotion, and structure. Reading with appropriate rhythm and intonation enhances comprehension by highlighting tone, emphasising key ideas, and reinforcing punctuation cues. This makes reading more engaging and natural while supporting overall fluency and confidence.

HOW

- 1. Choice of Passage:** Select key passages where tone, emotion, or phrasing are essential for comprehension. Identify sentences with punctuation that affects fluency, such as commas, dashes, or quotation marks. Plan to model expressive reading with attention to tone, emphasis, and pacing. Identify areas where students may struggle and plan rereading opportunities to refine fluency, incorporating prompts for tone and emphasis adjustments after discussion.
- 2. Capture the Mood:** Guide students to infer the character's emotions and model the appropriate tone and ask them to replicate it, e.g.: *"Tommy is upset. Abeer, can you read this sentence to reflect that?"*
- 3. Emphasise Key Words:** Ask students to highlight the most important words in a sentence and encourage them to reread with emphasis on those words, e.g.: *"Who can read this with more weight on the word 'gloomy'?"*
- 4. Check the Mechanics:** Explicitly teach how punctuation guides expression and pauses, e.g., *"There's a comma—pause here. How does that change the meaning?"*
- 5. Re-read for Fluency:** Reinforce expressive reading by asking students to reread after understanding the text,e.g., *"Now that we know the meaning, read it again with fluency."*



READING TECHNIQUES



Comprehension

Turning Words into Knowledge and Understanding

Reading is the gateway to learning, allowing students to access, interpret, and engage with the curriculum. The objective is to read for knowledge and understanding. When fluency is achieved, the focus shifts from decoding individual words to comprehending the content. This fluency frees up cognitive resources, enabling connections to be made, meanings to be inferred, and texts to be analysed, all of which are essential for comprehension.

Comprehension Techniques:

- » Limit Text and Gradually Increase
- » Focal Point
- » Time Limits
- » Interactive Reading Tasks
- » Confirm and Scaffold Comprehension
- » Skimming
- » Scanning
- » Zooming In and Out

Limit Text and Gradually Increase

WHAT

Limit Text and Gradually Increase is a strategy where students begin with short, manageable readings and gradually progress to more complex texts. This approach builds confidence, prevents overwhelm, ensures comprehension, and allows for personalised instruction and feedback.

WHY

Limit Text and Gradually Increase enables students to build confidence and ensure comprehension through manageable texts. By beginning with shorter readings, cognitive load is controlled, preventing overwhelm and enhancing focus. Gradual progression allows for structured skill development, while also facilitating personalised instruction and timely feedback. This approach ensures a solid foundation before advancing to more complex material.

HOW

- 1. Plan Pauses:** Identify key points in the text to pause for clarification, questioning, or discussion, ensuring students stay engaged.
- 2. Establish a Clear Placeholder:** Agree on a consistent cue with students to signal a pause and transition, e.g., use a command like "Hold your place, track me." to ensure a smooth response.
- 3. Ensure the placeholder is consistently used.** This will allow students to retain their place and allow them to immediately transition back to the text after the questioning /discussion, e.g., 'Finger freeze' , 'Finger in your book, close your book', 'Pen to page, hold your spot'
- 4. Clear Transition:** Transition back from questioning / discussion to reading could be facilitated by recognisable commands such as 'Pick up reading please, Abeer.' Or ' Let's read please, Sophie ."
- 5. Engage During Pauses:** Ask questions or prompt discussion to deepen comprehension, then smoothly transition students back to the text without losing their place.

Focal Point

WHAT

A focal point is a technique that directs students' attention to specific elements of a text, such as key ideas, vocabulary, or themes, within a particular passage. It is communicated before reading to help students focus on key aspects like the main idea, important details, or character development.

WHY

This technique enhances engagement and deepens understanding by encouraging students to read with a purpose. It improves retention by helping students make connections and draw conclusions. Additionally, it supports focused discussion after reading, ensuring students stay on track and can reflect on the text effectively.

HOW

- 1. Clarify the Focal Point:** Before reading, clearly communicate what students should focus on (e.g., a character's actions or the main idea). Use specific language to set expectations, e.g., »When you finish reading, explain how (named character) reacts to the events and what that shows about their personality.«
- 2. Use Specific CFU Questions:** Prepare targeted questions to check comprehension and guide students' focus. If needed, encourage rereading, e.g., "How does (named character) respond to the news about _____?"
- 3. Implement Cold Calling:** Inform students that they may be called on at any time. If a student answers incorrectly, encourage them to reread the relevant section, e.g., "What did (named character) say about _____? If unsure, check the text and try again."
- 4. Adapt During Reading:** Be ready to support students who struggle. Use formative assessments to gauge understanding and adjust your approach, e.g., "Reread the second paragraph and see what you can find about _____."
- 5. Review Post-Reading:** After reading, ask students to share their findings and ensure they've understood the focal point, e.g., "Let's discuss how the two characters disagree. What stood out to you?"

Time Limits

WHAT

Teachers establish finite time limits for independent reading, with a clearly defined endpoint. Students are encouraged to read at their own pace within this designated period, emphasising quality over quantity. The duration of the reading time may be adjusted according to the individual reading level of each student.

WHY

Setting time limits for independent reading helps students focus on quality over speed, enhancing comprehension and attention. The limits can be adjusted to suit individual reading levels, promoting gradual improvement in stamina and confidence. This approach also encourages students to track their progress and take ownership of their learning.

HOW

- 1. Focus on Quality Over Speed:** Encourage students to prioritise understanding the text rather than rushing through it.
- 2. Track Progress Using Pre-Agreed Markers:** Set clear markers for students to track their progress and identify areas for improvement.
- 3. Give Clear Instructions:** Clearly communicate the time limit, goals, and expectations for each reading session, so students understand what's required.
- 4. Chunk Reading with Mini-Reviews:** Break reading into smaller sections with brief reviews to reinforce comprehension and help students digest content more effectively.
- 5. Timers:** Use timers to structure the session, helping students stay on track. Gradually increase reading time to build stamina.
- 6. Pair Students for Accountability:** Pair students to foster peer accountability and provide feedback, allowing them to support one another.
- 7. Provide Focused Prompts:** Offer specific prompts to maintain the focus and purpose of the reading session.
- 8. Celebrate Progress:** Recognise and celebrate achievements to build motivation and reinforce positive reading habits.

Interactive Reading Tasks

WHAT

An interactive reading task requires students to actively engage with the text by marking key elements, such as important ideas, unfamiliar vocabulary, or themes. This involves students annotating the text by underlining, highlighting, or making notes in the margins.

WHY

Interactive Reading Tasks enhances engagement and comprehension by encouraging students to reflect on and process the content actively. It helps them track important information, identify patterns, and make connections. Additionally, the hands-on approach promotes a purposeful reading experience, increasing focus and improving retention of key concepts.

HOW

- 1. Pre-Reading Instructions:** Clearly explain the task's purpose and focus, e.g., "Mark key themes, unfamiliar words, and important ideas as you read."
- 2. Model the Process:** Demonstrate marking the text (underlining, highlighting, margin notes) to show how annotations help deepen understanding.
- 3. Provide Tools and Materials:** Ensure students have the necessary tools (highlighters, pens, sticky notes) and access to the text.
- 4. Set Clear Expectations:** Outline the text to read and key elements to mark, such as main ideas, questions, or vocabulary.
- 5. Incorporate Checkpoints:** Pause after a reading period to review annotations and ask guiding questions like, "What did you find important here?"
- 6. Allow Time for Reflection:** Encourage students to reread their annotations and reflect on how it enhanced their understanding.
- 7. Use Differentiation:** Tailor support based on proficiency, offering scaffolding for struggling readers or more advanced tasks for others.
- 8. Collaborate and Share:** Have students share their annotations in pairs or groups to discuss insights and deepen understanding.
- 9. Follow-up Discussion:** Conduct a class discussion using annotations to help students articulate and connect ideas.

Confirm And Scaffold Comprehension

WHAT

Confirm and scaffold comprehension activities are tasks that follow a reading session, requiring students to demonstrate their understanding of the material. These activities can be either written (e.g., summarising, answering questions) or oral (e.g., discussions, individual responses). The goal is to actively engage students with the text, helping them reflect on and articulate their comprehension.

WHY

Comprehension activities promote active engagement, reinforcing understanding through reflection and discussion. They help assess comprehension, identify areas for clarification, and encourage critical thinking by prompting analysis and evaluation. These tasks also provide valuable feedback, guiding improvement, and support memory retention by encouraging repeated interaction with the text.

HOW

- 1. Choose Appropriate Activities:** Select comprehension activities that align with the content and level of the students.
 - » **Exit Slips:** Students write one thing they learned and a question they still have.
 - » **Think-Pair-Share:** Students think, discuss with a partner, then share with the class.
 - » **Partner Reading & Summarising:** One student summarises, and the partner checks for accuracy.
 - » **Show Me Boards:** Students quickly write answers on whiteboards.
 - » **Jigsaw Reading:** Groups read different sections and share key points.
 - » **Graphic Organisers:** Students create visual organisers (e.g., Venn diagram, cause-effect chart).
- 2. Provide Clear Instructions and Model the Process:** Explain tasks clearly (e.g., Exit Slips) and demonstrate activities like Text Marking or Jigsaw Reading to ensure students understand how to engage.
- 3. Monitor Progress and Use Feedback for Improvement:** Walk around during activities to check comprehension and provide feedback to clarify misunderstandings and reinforce key points.
- 4. Celebrate Progress:** Acknowledge students' efforts and achievements to motivate continued engagement and learning.

Skimming

WHAT

Skimming is when a student quickly scans a text to grasp its general meaning by identifying key words and sentences. They don't need to read every word, just pick out key words and sentences allowing for a quick overview.

WHY

Skimming allows students to quickly grasp the main ideas of a text without reading every word, making it an efficient strategy for processing large amounts of information. By focusing on key words, headings, and topic sentences, students can filter out less relevant details, improving their ability to extract essential information.

HOW

- 1. Introduce the Purpose:** Explain what skimming is and highlight when to use it, such as previewing a text or searching for specific information.
- 2. Model the Technique:** Demonstrate how to skim by reading only titles, headings, subheadings, and bolded words. Show how to focus on the first and last sentences of paragraphs for main ideas.
- 3. Provide Structured Practice:** Give short texts and set a time limit for skimming. Ask students to summarise the main idea in one sentence.
- 4. Use Guided Questions:** Encourage students to ask: What is this text about? What are the key words or repeated phrases? Which parts stand out visually (headings, bold words, diagrams)?
- 5. Apply Skimming in Context:** Use real-life materials like newspapers, website articles, and reports.
- 6. Assess and Reflect:** Have students compare their skimming results with peers. Discuss how skimming helped them understand the text efficiently.

Scanning

WHAT

Scanning is a reading technique used to locate specific information quickly by moving line by line through a text. This method allows key details to be identified without reading the entire passage, making it effective for answering targeted questions.

WHY

Scanning helps students quickly locate key information without reading every word, making it essential for answering specific questions efficiently. It trains them to focus on relevant sections using keywords, headings, and patterns, improving information retrieval for assignments and exams. Teaching scanning also prevents students from feeling discouraged by dense texts, building confidence and promoting strategic reading habits.

HOW

- 1. Introduce and Model Scanning:** Explain the purpose of scanning, then demonstrate how to locate key information using headings, subheadings, and keywords. Stress that not every word needs to be read.
- 2. Set Timed Exercises and Structured Questions:** Use time limits (e.g., 3–5 minutes) to encourage quick reading and provide specific questions to focus on, guiding students on what to look for.
- 3. Leverage Text Structure, Practice, and Review:** Teach students to use the text's structure (headings, bullet points, etc.) and match question language to the text. Regularly practise scanning and review findings to refine the process.

Zooming In and Out

WHAT

Zooming In involves analysing specific words or phrases to uncover deeper meanings and their impact on tone or literary devices.

Zooming Out entails evaluating the text as a whole, considering themes, writer's intentions, and the overall message.

WHY

Zooming In helps students understand the nuances of language, tone, and literary techniques, deepening their comprehension and analytical skills.

Zooming Out enables students to grasp the broader themes, purposes, and messages of the text, encouraging a more holistic understanding and critical evaluation.

HOW

- 1. Introduce and Demonstrate Zooming In and Out:** Explain the difference between focusing on specific details (zooming in) and the bigger picture (zooming out). Use a familiar text to model both approaches, asking questions about word choice, tone, themes, and overall message.
- 2. Practice and Apply Both Methods:** Have students zoom in on key details, annotate, and reflect on their significance. Then, zoom out to identify overarching themes and how details support the larger meaning. Encourage students to alternate between the two methods for deeper analysis.
- 3. Collaborative Discussions and Feedback:** Facilitate group discussions where students share their insights from both perspectives. Provide feedback to reinforce the importance of connecting details to the broader context for a more comprehensive understanding.

SECTION 6

THE RESEARCH GUIDING THE PLAYBOOK

ADDITIONAL READING



The Research Guiding the Playbook

Reading is a complex process that involves both cognitive and experiential elements. The Read Like a GEM playbook is grounded in **Dual Coding Theory** (Paivio, 1986), **The Simple View of Reading** (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), and **Scarborough's Reading Rope**, each providing key insights into how reading skills develop and can be effectively taught.

Dual Coding Theory highlights the role of verbal and visual processing in reading, suggesting that when readers create mental images alongside text, comprehension and memory retention improve. This aligns with the *Simple View of Reading*, which defines reading comprehension as the product of two essential components: **decoding**—the ability to recognise and sound out words—and **linguistic comprehension**—understanding their meaning.

Building on this foundation, Scarborough's Reading Rope illustrates how skilled reading emerges through the integration of **word recognition** (phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency) and **language comprehension** (vocabulary, background knowledge, and inference). To support long-term retention and fluency, teachers should employ **systematic review, incremental instruction, and guided practice**, ensuring that each strand becomes automatic and deeply embedded.

These frameworks highlight the interconnected nature of

- **decoding**
- **language comprehension,**
- **the importance of systematic phonics instruction,**
- **and the role of background knowledge,**
- **fluency,**
- **vocabulary, and**
- **comprehension strategies in literacy development.**

At the heart of these theories is the understanding that reading is more than a mechanical skill—it is a deeply human experience. *Read Like a GEM* builds on this research by combining structured literacy approaches with engaging and meaningful reading experiences. By doing so, it ensures that students not only learn to read but also read to learn—unlocking the joy of lifelong literacy.

The Science and Art of Reading

The Science of Reading

The science of reading is rooted in cognitive research, focusing on the measurable processes that enable decoding, comprehension, and mastery of written language. It emphasises structured, evidence-based instruction informed by neuroscience and psychology. Key components include:

Phonemic Awareness – Recognising and manipulating sounds in spoken words.

Phonics – Understanding letter-sound relationships for decoding.

Fluency – Reading with speed, accuracy, and expression to support comprehension.

Vocabulary – Expanding word knowledge to enhance meaning and academic success.

Comprehension – Interpreting and analysing text by integrating decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and prior knowledge.

The ART of Reading

The art of reading explores the emotional, interpretive, and expressive aspects of literacy, fostering deeper engagement beyond technical skills. It includes:

Prosody – Using rhythm, tone, and expression to convey meaning and enhance engagement.

Critical Thinking – Analysing and interpreting texts, questioning the author's intent, and making meaningful connections.

Engagement – Forming personal, emotional connections with texts to deepen understanding and retention.

Imagination & Visualisation – Creating mental images that enrich the reading experience and bring stories to life.

Unlocking Lasting Literacy

STORE IT, RECALL IT, SECURE IT

STORE IT: Strengthen Mental Pathways

S: Structure & Chunk – Group words and ideas into patterns (word families, text structures) to aid retention.

T: Tweak the Task – Mix up text types and comprehension activities to build flexible thinking.

O: Organise with Visuals – Use mind maps, storyboards, and graphic organisers to reinforce connections.

R: Read for Fluency – Develop automatic word recognition so comprehension flows naturally.

E: Engage the Senses – Reinforce understanding through visuals, movement, and auditory support.

RECALL IT: Bring Knowledge Back

R: Retrieve to Remember – Strengthen memory with retrieval practice (quizzes, self-checks, mind maps).

E: Explain to a Friend – Use discussion strategies (Think-Pair-Share, Turn & Talk) to deepen understanding.

C: Create to Cement It – Write summaries, draw key ideas, or act out stories to solidify learning.

A: Apply & Analyse – Transfer knowledge across subjects and real-life contexts for deeper connections.

L: Link & Layer Learning – Compare books, themes, and texts to reinforce long-term understanding.

SECURE IT: Retain & Automate

S: Space Learning – Revisit reading skills regularly using spaced repetition.

E: Embed Retrieval – Strengthen recall with quizzes, self-checks, and summarisation.

C: Cultivate Fluency – Automate word recognition to free up cognitive resources.

U: Use Dual Coding – Pair text with visuals, gestures, and audio for better memory encoding.

R: Reinforce with Repetition – Repeated exposure to key vocabulary and structures enhances retention.

E: Engage Actively – Encourage paraphrasing, questioning, and interactive reading strategies.

Additional Reading

The Reading Mind: A Cognitive Approach to Understanding How the Mind Reads

Daniel T. Willingham

Closing the Reading Gap

Alex Quigley

Primary Reading Simplified

Christopher Such

The Art and Science of Teaching Primary Reading

Christopher Such

Reading Reconsidered: A Practical Guide to Rigorous Literacy Instruction

Doug Lemov, Colleen Driggs, and Erica Woolway

Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction

Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, and Linda Kucan

Shifting the Balance: 6 Ways to Bring the Science of Reading into the Balanced Literacy Classroom

Jan Burkins and Kari Yates

Mind the Gap: A Guide to Literacy for Teachers

Chris Chivers

EEF Reading House: Education Endowment Foundation

Reading House (search for "Reading House" on their official site).

Open University Reading for Pleasure: OpenLearn

Reading for pleasure: exploring the concept (free course and resources).

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)

- Improving Literacy in Primary Schools
- "Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning"
- "Teaching and Learning Toolkit"
- "The Primary Literacy Toolkit"

David Didau



Training video to be used with INSET



Why we need to read aloud



The problems with 'following along'



PLAYBOOK

THE SCIENCE AND ART OF READING

JUNE 2025
VERSION 2.1

GEMS
EDUCATION