

## Features of Literacy Programs: A Decision-Making Matrix

Prepared by the Commission on Reading  
National Council of Teachers of English

### Purpose

The Commission on Reading of the National Council of Teachers of English regularly undertakes projects to broaden discussion of important literacy issues and to provide support for teachers as they make informed instructional decisions. Commission members developed the matrix that follows in response to requests from NCTE members for sound, standards-aligned criteria to apply as they select program materials or design local programs of instruction in reading. It is intended to be used as part of professional discussion among colleagues.

### Model

The model on which the matrix is based is aligned with the position statement, "On Reading, Learning to Read, and Effective Reading Instruction: An Overview of What We Know and How We Know It" (<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/read/118620.htm>), developed by NCTE's Commission on Reading. Reading is a complex, purposeful, social, and cognitive process in which readers simultaneously use their knowledge of spoken and written language, their knowledge of the topic of the text, and their knowledge of their culture to construct meaning. Effective reading instruction is grounded in a professional knowledge of how readers make sense of print and how students learn. All instruction is based on a careful observation of learners' reading to determine appropriate instruction.

### Users

The matrix is intended as a discussion and decision-making tool for teachers and curriculum developers working together to select instructional materials. Educators do this based on their understandings of the nature and uses of literacy and their beliefs about how literacy is developed. The matrix may be found at the NCTE Web site: [http://www.ncte.org/library/files/About\\_NCTE/Overview/ReadingMatrixFinal.pdf](http://www.ncte.org/library/files/About_NCTE/Overview/ReadingMatrixFinal.pdf)

### Matrix Features

The matrix offers categorized features for teachers to consider in making local decisions about appropriate materials and goals for literacy instruction. Blank rows are provided for additional features users find relevant. Instructional emphases will vary depending on students' age and proficiency in reading and writing. For example, the early features listed under word recognition and word study will be most applicable to elementary programs. These features are ranked by the NCTE Commission on Reading as (4) essential, (3) important, (2) less important, (1) not important for an effective program of literacy instruction. Decisions about the relative importance of various features are based on published research and professional resources. However, each group using the matrix should determine its own rankings by considering local needs, standards, and definitions of reading. Furthermore, *the Commission emphasizes that numeric evaluation of program features is less important than the conversations prompted by the use of the matrix.*

### Matrix Use

1) In Column 2 on the matrix, rate each feature in terms of its importance (1-4) for an effective literacy program.

2) For each literacy program under consideration (whether commercially or locally designed), mark each feature to the degree of its presence in the program. Use **H** to indicate high degree/presence in significant amount, **M** to indicate medium degree/presence in some amount, and **L** to indicate low degree/presence in little or no amount. A desirable program will be one in which features seen as essential or important are evident to a high degree. Educators may wish to add other features and compare the ones they rank highly (3-4) with those given high rankings in the matrix designed by the Commission.

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You might find it useful to complete the following two statements before using the matrix and starting your conversations.

1) Reading is:

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2) Reading instruction should be:

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Program Name \_\_\_\_\_

<b>INTENDED AUDIENCE</b> (check all that apply)	
Primary	
Intermediate	
Middle School	
High School	
English Language Learners (ELL)	
Native English Speakers	
Students requiring reading intervention	

NCTE Commission on Reading indicates (4) as essential, (3) as important, (2) as less important, or (1) as not an important feature for an effective literacy program. Decisions about the relative importance of various features are based on published research and professional resources. Rate **H** to indicate high degree/presence, **M** to indicate medium degree/presence, **L** to indicate low degree/presence in each reviewed program. A desirable program will be one in which features seen as essential or important are seen in a high degree.

The "1" column shows NCTE's rating of program features. The "2" column is for your own rating of the features.	1	2	Degree of Presence		
			H	M	L
<b>MEDIA/TOOLS</b>					
Books					
Authentic connected texts, complete & unabridged	4				
Predictable texts	4				
Decodable texts	1				
Abridged texts	2				
Skills-based texts	1				
Leveled texts	2				
Non-fiction texts	4				
Classroom libraries	4				
Controlled vocabulary	1				
Original illustrations	4				
Publisher-substituted illustrations	1				
Videotapes	2				
Internet	2				
Computer software	3				
Audiotapes	3				
School-to-home connections	4				
Suggestions for extended readings	4				
Recall level worksheets	1				

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<b>MATERIALS REPRESENT</b>					
Authentic multicultural perspectives (text and illustrations)	4				
Accurate, current information	4				
Wide range of purposes	4				
High literary quality	4				
Range of authors	4				
Multiple disciplines	4				
Multiple genres	4				
Content likely to engage and interest readers	4				
Content that is age and developmentally appropriate	4				
Content that is of interest to both genders	4				
Conceptual or thematic structures	4				
<b>PARTICIPANT STRUCTURES/GROUPINGS</b>					
Whole class	3				
Small groups	4				
Individual (instructional and independent)	4				
Flexible groups (interest, ability)	4				
Pull out instruction	2				
Fixed ability groups	1				
<b>INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES</b>					
Scripted, sequenced, teacher-directed	1				
Student generated topics and questions	4				
Strategies and skills taught in isolation	1				
Strategies and skills embedded in meaningful text	4				
Scaffolded instruction toward independence	4				
Discussion	4				
Role play	3				
Projects	3				
Extensive independent reading (SSR, free choice reading)	4				
Student choice of instructional texts	4				
Literature study	4				
Guided reading	3				

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Shared reading	3				
Partner reading	3				
<b>COMPREHENSION</b>					
Development of higher level thinking and critical literacy	4				
Emphasis on meaning making with connected text, including focus on using fiction and non-fiction text structures and features	4				
Emphasis on application of skills in isolated text excerpts	1				
Multiple perspectives, themes, and interpretations	4				
Independence in learning/self-directed	4				
Development of cognitive strategies (predicting, questioning confirming, summarizing, inferring)	4				
Development of metacognitive strategies	4				
Support of risk-taking	4				
Development of multiple cueing systems	4				
Opportunities for comprehension work	4				
• before reading					
• during reading					
• after reading					
Intertextuality	4				
Development of schema	4				
• connections to current knowledge					
• development of new knowledge					
<b>WORD RECOGNITION AND WORD STUDY</b>					
Phonemic awareness in isolation	1				
Phonemic awareness in context	3				
Phonological awareness	2				
Phonics in isolation	1				
Phonics in context	3				
Alphabetic principle	4				
Sight words	4				
Reading fluency with comprehension	4				
Reading fluency without comprehension	1				
Miscues as a window into cue and strategy utilization	4				

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Decoding of pseudo words	1				
Word families	4				
Experiential base for vocabulary	4				
Etymological focus for vocabulary	3				
Vocabulary lists	2				
Vocabulary from text	4				
Vocabulary building with roots & affixes	3				
Word lists	1				
Concept-driven vocabulary instruction	4				
<b>READING/WRITING CONNECTIONS</b>					
Constructed spelling as approximation	4				
Spelling as a window into phonics knowledge	4				
Response to text in students' own words	4				
Response to text as fill in the blanks	1				
Reading and writing integrated, e.g. text as a source for student writing opportunities	4				
Essay form	2				
Multiple choice responses to reading	1				
Discussions about individual and social uses of literacy	4				
<b>STUDENT ROLE</b>					
Choice of reading selections	4				
Choice of reading extension activities	4				
Documenting and assessing reading growth via self-reflection, portfolio development, process journals, etc.	4				
Completion of reading logs	2				
Problem-solving & resourcefulness encouraged	4				
Increased independence and responsibility	4				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social interaction around literacy</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inquiry into own and others literacy processes and practices</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• risk-taking in reading &amp; writing encouraged</li> </ul>					

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<b>ASSESSMENT</b>					
Formal, standardized	1				
Unit tests	1				
Classroom-based, ongoing (running record, miscue analysis, retelling, anecdotal observations, student reading histories, records of reading)	4				
Multiple choice comprehension tests	2				
Student directed	3				
Written reactions and responses to texts	4				
Portfolios	4				
Lists of learners' reading experiences	4				
<b>PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT</b>					
Scripts for implementation of program	1				
Data on student outcomes	3				
Support for teacher research, e.g. teacher inquiry topics and findings	3				
Support for meeting needs of individual students (resources, instructional approaches)	4				
Resources and professional development experiences to build teacher knowledge about learning and literacy	4				
Research and theory base of the program provided	4				
Support for teacher as instructional decision-maker	4				
Provision for parent education, support, and involvement	4				

Having completed the matrix, how close is the match between the program and your definition of reading and what you believe reading instruction should be?

## Selected Resources

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