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# Oral Language and Literacy: Joy School English Teaches Language and Literacy Skills to Help Students Succeed in School

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## Introduction

Strong oral language skills provide children with a solid foundation to become confident communicators and successful readers and writers (Moats, 2020). Research shows that children who enter school with strong oral language skills learn to read and write with greater ease and are often more successful academically than children who have weak oral language skills (Byrnes & Wasik, 2019). Speaking and listening skills acquired early in a child's life are critical to helping them succeed in school (Whorrall & Cabell, 2016).

Although oral language is often acquired naturally, there is substantial variation in children's language learning environments prior to entering public school. These variations have a profound impact on children's confidence and abilities to acquire literacy skills (Justice et al., 2018). When a child whose home language is not primarily English enters school, they tend to fall behind their peers in reading and usually have greater difficulty catching up (Moats, 2020; Byrnes & Wasik, 2019). Children who come from homes that don't speak English have the challenge of learning a new language while simultaneously trying to learn other academic skills. Consequently, these students must learn English extremely efficiently in order to catch up to their peers (Lesaux & Harris, 2021).

Preschool is a critical time to help English learners develop their oral language skills. During preschool years, English learners need numerous opportunities to speak and be spoken to in order to strengthen their language skills (Byrnes & Wasik, 2019). However, according to Diane August (2002) from the Center for Applied Statistics, English learners spend less than two percent of their school day participating in oral interactions. Current research suggests that English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum should focus on oral language, with the goal of providing more opportunities for children to practice speaking and listening (Morrow et al., 2016).

Joy School English is a digital program developed by Alegra Learning to teach oral language and basic literacy skills to preschool and kindergarten aged children who have limited experience with English. The Joy School English app provides thousands of opportunities for children to speak English in a low-stress environment. Students work independently on a student app that is full of unique books, activities, videos, songs, and games, each carefully crafted to effectively help students speak English and learn basic literacy concepts.

This paper synthesizes the latest research on oral language and discusses how oral language impacts the development of reading and writing skills. The paper concludes with a product overview of Joy School English and explains how the Joy School English app can be used to help young children acquire the language and literacy skills they need to become successful speakers, readers, and writers.

## Oral Language Overview

At its most basic level, oral language is the speaking and listening skills that allow individuals to both express themselves and understand others. Oral language skills are used to share ideas, thoughts, and feelings with others. Oral language also allows people to ask questions, make requests, as well as learn new information (Lesaux & Harris, 2021).

Languages vary across the world, but speakers of a common language understand and follow a universal set of rules in order to communicate effectively. These rules determine how sounds, words, and sentences are produced and when they are used. Although the rules of languages may differ, all languages include at least five common components: 1) Vocabulary, 2) Phonology, 3) Morphology, 4) Syntax, and 5) Pragmatics (Moats, 2020).

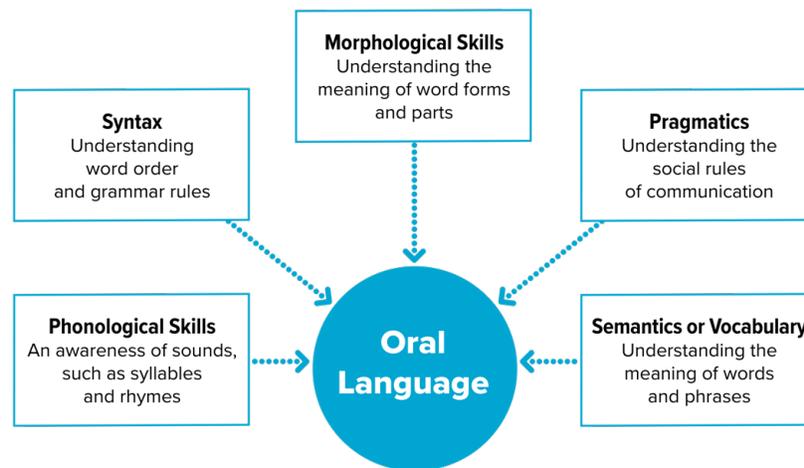


Figure 1. Components of Oral Language from Moats, L. C. (2020) *Speech to print: Language essentials for teachers*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

### Phonological Skills

Phonology is the study of how a language organizes its speech sounds. Words in a language are made up of phonemes, which are the smallest units of sound (Wiese, 2006). Examples of English phonemes include consonants (e.g., /b/, /p/, /f/), digraphs (e.g., /sh/, /ch/, /th/), and vowels (e.g., /a/, /e/, /ō/), as well as many other sounds. A finite set of phonemes can make thousands of words.

Humans begin developing phonological awareness very early in life. When a child is born, they can distinguish the phonemes of all the languages across the world (Kuhl, 1998; Jusczyk et al., 1993). However, after babies are surrounded by their native language for six months, they begin to lose their ability to hear phonemes that are not part of their native language. For instance, adult Japanese speakers are notorious for having difficulty distinguishing between /r/ and /l/ sounds, but Japanese newborns have no difficulty distinguishing between the two phonemes. Kuhl (1998) discovered that at 11 months old, the Japanese children lost their ability to hear the difference between /r/ and /l/. This occurs because in the first few months of life, the brain concentrates on and organizes the speech sounds of a person's native language and deemphasizes sounds that don't exist in the native language since they

are unnecessary. Losing the ability to hear nonessential phonemes allows children to acquire language faster (Bjorklund & Causey, 2018).

The ability to say and pronounce words correctly depends on a person's ability to hear and produce the sounds of the language. For example, in English the words *cake*, *bake*, and *shake* all vary by their initial phoneme, but asking for a cake or a shake will have two different outcomes. Children must be able to distinguish between phonemes to understand what a person is saying, and they must be able to produce the correct phonemes in order to be understood. In short, phonological awareness aids a person's ability to recognize words, pronounce words correctly, and accurately interpret what others are saying (Moats, 2020).

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## Semantics or Vocabulary

Semantics is the study of the meaning of words or phrases. Words within a language have meanings that are agreed upon by the speakers. Although language is constantly evolving, individuals cannot make up words and expect others to understand or use those words. The meanings of words or phrases must be shared by the speakers of the language so people have a common framework to communicate and understand one another (Moats, 2020).

Individuals develop a bank of vocabulary words over time. The words in a person's vocabulary bank can be divided into two categories: receptive and expressive (Wise et al., 2007). Receptive vocabulary is words that are understood when another person is speaking. For example a child's ability to hear and follow the instruction, "Put on your shoes," relies on their receptive language skills. Expressive vocabulary is the words a speaker is able to use when talking. Usually receptive vocabulary is much larger than expressive vocabulary because it is easier for children to recognize and understand language when it is used in context. If a parent says, "Put on your shoes," and points to the child's shoes, the child is likely to understand the parent's instructions even if the child can't say the phrase themselves (Morrow et al., 2016).

Knowledge of words and phrases exists on a continuum from incomplete and erroneous to a complete and accurate understanding. Dale (1965) proposes four stages to help explain an individual's understanding of a word:

- **Stage 1:** Never having seen the term before
- **Stage 2:** Knowing there is such a word, but not knowing what it means
- **Stage 3:** Having context-bound and vague knowledge of the word's meaning
- **Stage 4:** Knowing the word well and remembering it

Word knowledge is accumulated gradually over time as children are exposed to a word numerous times and in multiple contexts. With each exposure, children gain a deeper understanding of the word (Stahl & Stahl, 2004). A child's ability to understand language is impacted by the depth of their understanding of the words and the number of words they know.

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## Morphological Skills

Morphology is the study of words and how they are formed. Words are made up of morphemes. Morphemes differ from phonemes whereas phonemes are the smallest unit of sound in a word, morphemes are the smallest unit of meaning. Words can be divided into meaningful parts like prefixes (e.g., un, re, ex), suffixes (e.g., -ed, -est, -less), and roots (e.g., agri, aqua, geo). Morphological awareness helps speakers understand words. For instance, if an individual knows the word *hope* and they understand the suffix *-less*, the first time they encounter the word *hopeless*, they will have a better chance of understanding the meaning of the word. Morphological awareness helps speakers build their vocabulary by supporting their ability to decipher new words when they are encountered (Moats, 2020).

## Syntax

Syntax is the grammar rules for how a language combines words and structures sentences to convey meaning (Cain, 2007; Nation & Snowling, 2000). Fluent English speakers know that there is a specific sequence for how words are arranged within a sentence. To an English speaker, the sentence, “Black have I cat,” sounds odd, but rearranging the same words to, “I have a black cat,” sounds very natural. Even though speakers may not be able to articulate the grammar rules, they inherently know that the subject of a sentence comes before the verb and adjectives come before the noun they describe. Fluent English speakers also know that the word choice and the relationship of the words within a sentence matters. For example, Chomsky’s famous sentence, “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously,” shows how a sentence can be grammatically correct, but still lack meaning. The words we choose and how we arrange them within a sentence influences comprehension.

Most people naturally acquire syntactic awareness by spending a lot of time listening to their native language. After a significant amount of listening, most children pick up on the basic rules and even overgeneralize the rules, such as adding “s” to make a noun plural (e.g., My foot**s** are cold.) or adding “-ed” for the past tense of a verb (I eat**ed** cereal for breakfast). When learning a new language, speakers must learn the set of rules that govern the language, as well as the exceptions to the rules, so they can comprehend the language and speak in a competent manner.

## Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of how context influences the meaning of language, including body language, tone, turn taking, and other social rules. Pragmatics looks beyond the literal meaning of what a speaker is saying in order to understand what the speaker is implying. For example someone might ask, “Can you shut the door?” If the listener interpreted that question literally, they would answer with “Yes” or “No.” However, someone who can read the context knows the person is actually asking them to shut the door. Understanding pragmatics helps speakers interpret social situations and communicate effectively (Snow & Uccelli, 2009; Rowe & Snow, 2020).

All languages have the five components that were identified by Moats (2020): 1) Phonological Skills, 2) Semantics or Vocabulary, 3) Morphological Skills, 4) Syntax, and 5) Pragmatics. In order to master a language, a person must become proficient in hearing and producing the sounds of the language as well as gain an understanding of the meaning of the words, the grammar structure, and the social nuances for how the language is expressed.

Strong oral language skills provide children with a solid foundation to become confident communicators and successful readers and writers. Research shows that children who enter school with strong oral language skills learn to read and write with greater ease and tend to be more successful academically than children who have weak oral language skills (Byrnes & Wasik, 2019). The following section explains how oral language impacts reading and writing skills.

## Oral Language and Literacy

Archeological accounts reveal that oral languages were developed before written languages. This is also true for individuals: humans develop the ability to speak before they develop the ability to read or write (Shanahan, 2016). Humans begin speaking around 12–18 months old, but most children don’t begin reading until they are at least three years old. Written symbols were developed to represent spoken language, and children must become speakers and listeners before they will be able to read or write (Morrow et al., 2016). Oral language provides the foundation for children to become readers and writers.

Recently educators have become interested in helping students improve their oral language skills because of the powerful impact it has on student readiness for school and academic success. Students with high levels of phonological awareness, semantics, and syntax have an easier time learning to read than children with lower levels of these skills (Byrnes & Wasik, 2019). There is now significant evidence supporting the idea that preschool students with weak oral language skills struggle to keep pace with their peers in later years (Biemiller, 2006; Dougherty, 2014; Hart & Risely, 2003; Scarborough, 2001). According to Biemiller (2003), children with advanced listening comprehension skills prior to kindergarten are about a year ahead of the average kindergarten student, and those with poor listening skills are about a year behind. Other researchers have found that it is possible to predict how successful a child will be in school based on their language development at age three (Lee, 2011). Oral language skills acquired early in a child's life are critical to helping them become proficient readers and writers (Whorrall & Cabell, 2016).

To understand how oral language impacts reading, one must first understand the skills that are required to become a proficient reader. The next sections explain two reading models: Gough and Turner's Simple View of Reading (1986) and Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001). These models were developed to help parents, educators, and researchers understand the skills needed to comprehend written text.

### Simple View of Reading

Gough and Turner (1986) propose a model for reading comprehension which they call the Simple View of Reading (SVR). The SVR describes reading comprehension as the product of decoding and language comprehension, as shown in Figure 2.1.

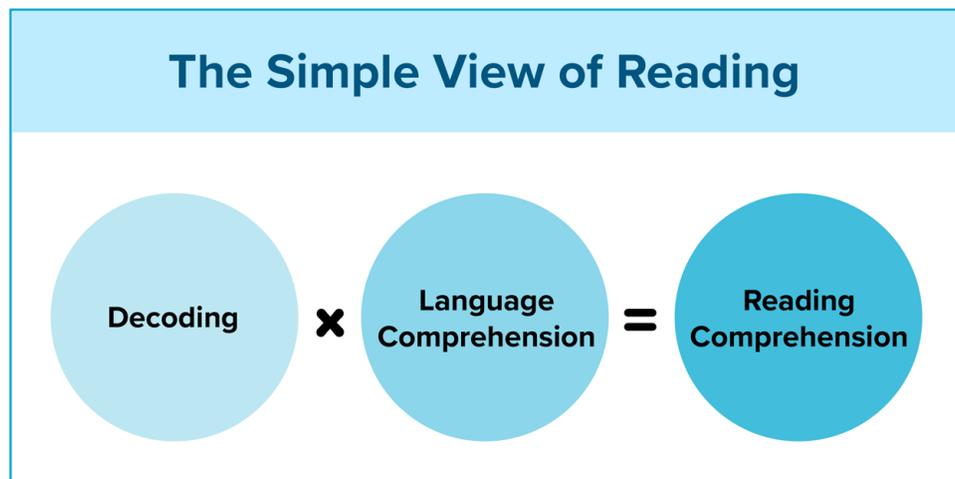


Figure 2.1 Simple View of Reading Formula (From Gough P. & Turner, W. 1986) Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, 7, 6–10. P. 7 copyright 1986 SAGE Publications.

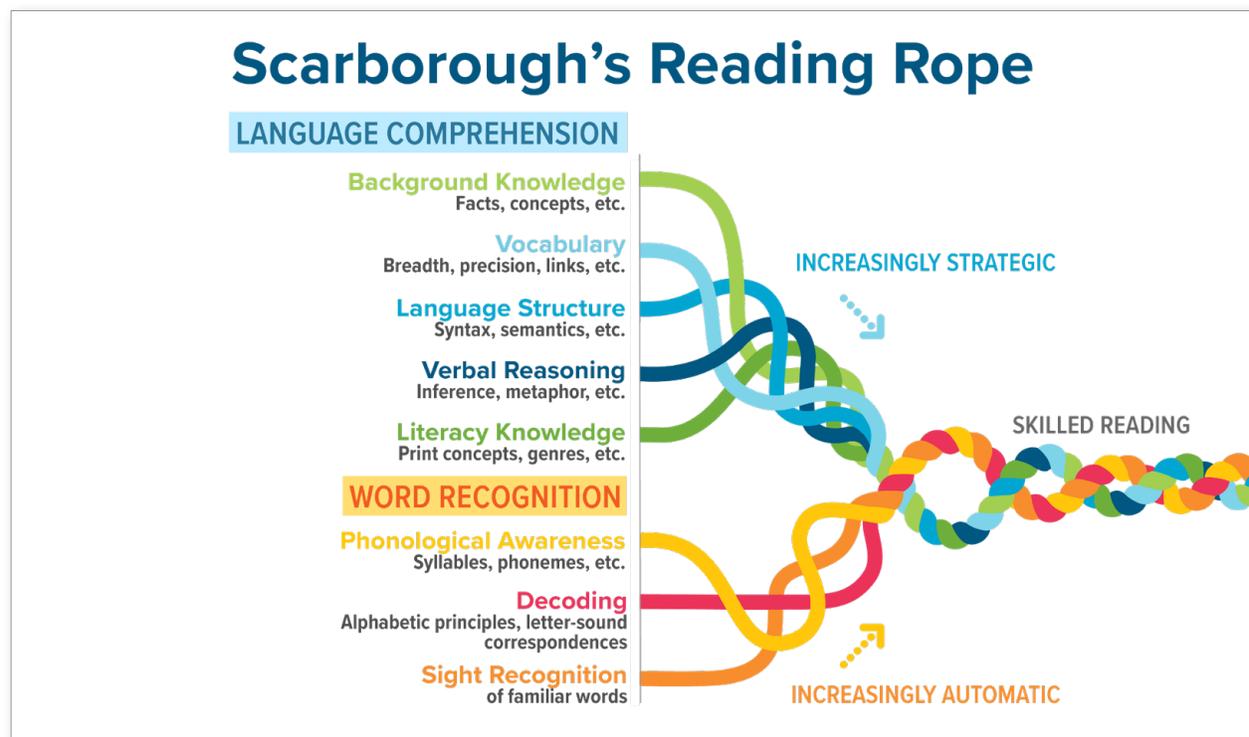
Gough and Turner (1986) offered the SVR model to help settle the reading wars, in which researchers and educators were fighting over phonics based and whole language approaches to reading. The SVR formula represents the idea that reading comprehension can be attributed to two components: decoding (D) and language comprehension (LC). Decoding is defined as the ability to quickly and accurately pronounce words. Language comprehension is the ability to derive meaning from text as if it had been spoken aloud. The SVR equation is the *product* of decoding and language comprehension rather than the *sum* of the two. This implies that students must have a score above zero on each component in order to achieve reading comprehension. In other words, both decoding and language comprehension are es-

essential for readers to extract meaning from text, and neither component is sufficient on its own (Gough & Turner, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990). Students are not reading if they decode words but do not understand their meaning (Byrnes & Wasik, 2019). For example, a reader who can decode the word *politics* but does not understand what it means cannot achieve reading comprehension. Likewise, students cannot achieve reading comprehension if they know the word *giraffe* when it is spoken aloud but cannot decode the word in its written form. Students cannot comprehend text unless they possess both decoding and language comprehension skills.

Scarborough (2001) expands the SVR model of reading by explicitly listing the skills that are needed for students to be able to decode and comprehend language. Scarborough called her model the Reading Rope. Although Scarborough didn't base the Reading Rope on SVR, she used the same components and broke each component down into subskills. SVR could be described as the bird's eye view of reading, while Scarborough's Reading Rope is a zoomed-in version where all the subskills are visible.

### Scarborough's Reading Rope

Scarborough's Reading Rope was designed by Dr. Hollis Scarborough to help parents and teachers understand the complexities of reading (Scarborough, 2001). The Reading Rope is a visual metaphor to explain how reading skills are tightly integrated and build on one another. The full rope represents a skilled reader, and when the rope is unraveled, it reveals the individual skills that are required for reading comprehension. The model shows two smaller pieces of rope (word recognition and language comprehension) that are intertwined to make one strong rope. Each of the smaller pieces of rope are made up of strands or subskills. The word recognition strands include phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition, and the language comprehension strands include background knowledge, vocabulary, language structure, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge. Scarborough's Reading Rope visually illustrates how language comprehension and word recognition skills are intertwined and interdependent. Each strand represents a skill that, when mastered and combined with other skills, creates a proficient reader. If one strand (skill) is weak, the strength of the rope is also weakened, and it is difficult for a student to become a skilled reader.



## WORD RECOGNITION

The goal for word recognition is to help children move from sounding out words to accurately and automatically reading words. Skilled readers should be able to see a printed word and automatically know how to pronounce it. When word recognition is accurate and automatic, students are able to use their cognitive efforts to comprehend the text (Garnett, 2011). Scarborough's Reading Rope includes three word recognition skills: 1) phonological awareness, 2) decoding, and 3) sight recognition. This section will discuss these skills and how each contributes to the development of proficient readers.

### Phonological Awareness

As mentioned previously, phonological awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate sounds in a spoken language. Phonological awareness differs from decoding and phonics because the tasks are focused solely on sound; print is not involved. Phonological awareness includes skills such as rhyme, alliteration, blending, and segmenting. The first phonological skills children tend to acquire are the awareness of syllables and rhyme. Then children become aware of alliteration, and finally they develop the ability to blend, segment, and manipulate individual phonemes (Moats, 2020). Table 2.1 shows the order of phonological tasks from easiest to most difficult for 4 and 5 year olds.

**Table 2.1** Rank Order of Phonological Awareness Tasks from Easiest to Most Difficult

Rank	Task	Example	4 yr. old	5 yr. old	Both
1	Blending syllables	Put this word together: el - e - phant	84%	92%	88%
2	Segmenting syllables	Say the syllables in kangaroo	62%	81%	70%
3	Rhyme detection	Which words rhyme? bat, dog, rat	58%	74%	67%
4	Alliteration categorization	Find all the things that start with /s/	53%	71%	63%
5	Blending onset/rime units	Put this word together: m - an	42%	61%	49%
6	Alliteration detection	Which picture starts with the same sound as cat?	32%	57%	47%
7	Rhyme production	Tell me a word that rhymes with <i>doll</i> .	31%	54%	43%
8	Blending phonemes	Put this word together: sh - o - p	13%	29%	21%
9	Segmenting onset/rime	Break <i>fan</i> into two parts.	8%	22%	15%
10	Segmenting phonemes	Say the three sounds in <i>home</i> .	3%	7%	5%

Adapted from Paulson, L. H. (2004). *The development of phonological awareness skills in preschool children: From syllables to phonemes*. ed.D. dissertation, University of Montana and Moats, L. C. (2020) *Speech to print: Language essentials for teachers*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

As Paulson's table shows, working with phonemes, or phonemic awareness, is more difficult for young children than working with rhymes and syllables. Noticing individual speech sounds in words is difficult for approximately 25% of children (Adams et al., 1998). Children speak in whole words and sentences and seldom think about the individual sounds that make up a word. For example, if children are asked how many sounds they hear in the word gum, many will say one because they don't hear the individual phonemes /g/, /u/, /m/ (Murray, 2016).

The sounds are coarticulated, which means they overlap and blend together to make a single word. To build phonemic awareness, teachers must help students explicitly hear the individual phonemes within words.

Although phonemic awareness is one of the most difficult phonological skills, it is the most important skill for learning to decode and spell (National Early Literacy Reading Panel, 2008). Reading and spelling are both dependent on the ability to blend and segment phonemes (Munger et al., 2016). Until reading becomes automatic, reading relies on the ability to blend sounds together to form words, and until spelling becomes automatic, spelling requires the ability to segment a word into its individual sounds (Murray, 2016).

The correlation between phonological awareness and reading acquisition is one of the most robust findings in cognitive psychology that has been replicated across languages (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). When children have well-developed phonological skills, they tend to be successful readers (National Reading Panel, 2000). Studies have shown that a child's level of phonemic awareness when entering kindergarten is one of the strongest predictors of reading success (Adams, 1990; Stanovich, 1986; Byrnes & Wasik, 2019; Lundberg et al., 1980; Muter et al., 2004). Students with a strong foundation in phonological awareness are well prepared to decode text.

### Decoding

Decoding is what most people picture when they think of beginning readers: children looking at text and sounding it out. When children decode, they match the letters (graphemes) to their corresponding sounds (phonemes). Decoding requires knowledge of the alphabetic principle and letter sound correspondences (Murray, 2016). With this knowledge, students can blend sounds together to read simple words. Beginning readers usually start decoding one syllable words and then progress to longer words. Proficient readers still use their decoding skills. For example, when a skilled reader comes across a word they don't recognize, the reader uses their decoding skills to help figure out how to pronounce it. Imagine encountering the word *floccinaucinihilipilification* while reading a text. This is an actual word, but most proficient readers have not encountered it and would need to use their decoding skills to figure out how to pronounce the word correctly. Decoding provides readers with a code to recognize familiar words and to sound out words that are not familiar to them (Murray, 2016).

When children start reading they are usually decoding most of the words, but reading text by decoding each word takes a lot of time and energy, which takes away from the overall comprehension of the text. Imagine reading a text full of words like *floccinaucinihilipilification* and the amount of effort it would take to try to pronounce all the words correctly. When readers are constantly decoding, their comprehension is being disrupted (Ehri, 2005). However, if children can recall words with automaticity, their reading becomes fluent and they have more energy to focus on the meaning of the text (Ehri, 2005). Learning to recognize words by sight is essential to becoming a fluent reader (Ehri, 2005).

### Sight Recognition

Sight recognition is the ability to see a familiar word and instantly process it. Our sight word memory includes all the words we can read accurately and effortlessly without decoding. There are two common types of sight words: non-phonetic words and high frequency words. Non-phonetic words include any word that is not spelled according to the sounds the letters represent, such as *to*, *of*, and *the*. Since these words are not decodable, students must learn to read the words by sight. High frequency words are the most commonly used words in text. Although words such as *and*, *on*, and *is* are decodable, these words appear so often in children's texts that memorizing them increases reading fluency (Joseph et al., 2013).

Approximately half of the words used in reading materials for young children are high frequency words (Fry et al., 2000). Researchers recommend teaching high frequency words as early as preschool because it helps students build confidence (Yaw et al., 2012). When students are able to read the majority of the words in a text with automaticity and accuracy, their reading becomes more fluent and takes less effort (Mulé et al., 2018). Without sight word

vocabularies, students are forced to spend the majority of their energy decoding each word rather than understanding what the text means as a whole (Simonton, 2019).

The ultimate goal of word recognition is for readers to see written words and be able to pronounce them accurately and effortlessly so the reader can use their energy to focus on the meaning (Volpe et al., 2011). When students are in the beginning stages of reading, they rely heavily on phonological awareness and decoding skills (Frost et al., 2005). As these skills are strengthened and become more automatic, sight recognition and fluency increase. According to Scarborough's Rope, phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition are woven together over time until reading text becomes increasingly automatic. When readers become "skilled," the majority of the words in a text are read with automaticity (Garnett, 2011).

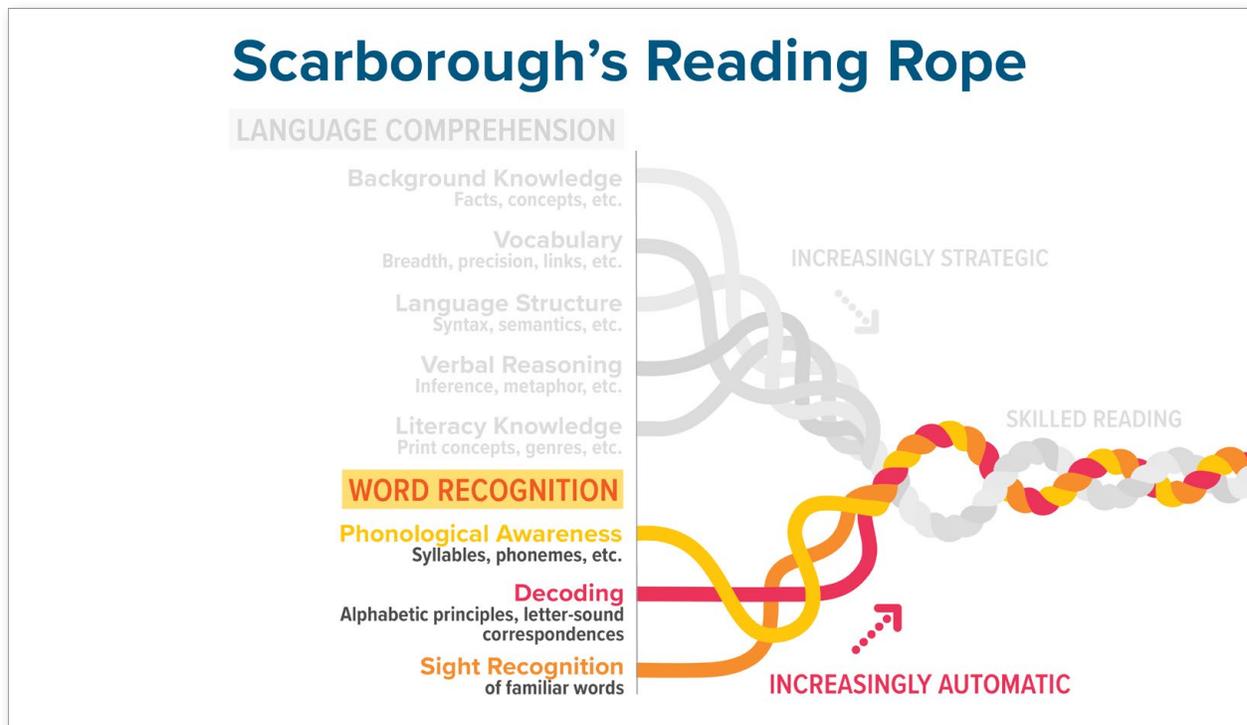


Figure 2.3. Word Recognition skills are woven together over time until reading becomes increasingly automatic.

Word recognition on its own will not create skilled readers. It is possible for students to develop word recognition skills without having enough language to comprehend the text. This is called "barking at print." Students decode text, but they lack the oral language skills to be able to comprehend what they are reading. Skilled readers must be able to recognize the written words and understand what the words mean and how they relate to each other.

## LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

Once students have developed their word recognition skills, the dominant skill that determines reading comprehension is the student's ability to comprehend language (Vellutino et al., 2008). Without adequate levels of oral language, it is difficult for students to comprehend written text. As Moats (2020) stated, "We cannot expect students to comprehend written text any better than they can comprehend spoken text." A student who can decode and read a passage with accuracy will not comprehend it unless the student understands the words in their spoken form, can parse the syntactic and semantic relationships among the words, and is able to apply their background knowledge on the topic (Scarborough, 2001). This section

will discuss the subskills included in the language comprehension component of Scarborough’s Reading Rope.

### Background Knowledge

Background knowledge refers to the experiences, knowledge, and concepts students have stored in their heads (Scarborough, 2002). Students use background knowledge to make sense of what they are reading (Murray, 2016). Having knowledge about a variety of subjects, topics, and ideas makes it more likely that students will be able to understand what they are reading. For instance, two individuals might read the same article or book but when asked to summarize it, they might give varying responses depending on their backgrounds, prior knowledge, views, and expectations of the text (Moats, 2020). The more experience students have with the subject they are reading about, the more likely students will find the text interesting, easy to stay focused on, and effortless to read (Murray, 2016). The following abstract from a statistics journal demonstrates how readers may be able to read all the words in a text but still find it difficult to comprehend due to their lack of background knowledge.

#### Fitting Linear Fixed-Effects Models Using lme4

Maximum likelihood or restricted maximum likelihood (REML) estimates of the parameters in linear mixed-effects models can be determined using the lmer function in the lme4 package for R. As for most model-fitting functions in R, the model is described in an lmer call by a formula, in this case including both fixed- and random-effects terms. The formula and data together determine a numerical representation of the model from which the profiled deviance or the profiled REML criterion can be evaluated as a function of some of the model parameters. The appropriate criterion is optimized, using one of the constrained optimization functions in R, to provide the parameter estimates. We describe the structure of the model, the steps in evaluating the profiled deviance or REML criterion, and the structure of classes or types that represents such a model. Sufficient detail is included to allow specialization of these structures by users who wish to write functions to fit specialized linear mixed models, such as models incorporating pedigrees or smoothing splines, that are not easily expressible in the formula language used by lmer (Bates et al., 2014).

Most adults can read the abstract written above, but comprehending the abstract may be difficult for those who don’t have a background in statistics. Likewise, students lacking background knowledge about the text they are reading will often find it difficult to comprehend and less enjoyable to read. Although it is not possible for teachers to provide the required background knowledge for every text students will read, teachers can help students gain a base of general knowledge through exposure to books, newspapers, videos, museums, and other experiences. The more robust a student’s general knowledge of the world and topic of the text, the more likely they will comprehend it (Moats, 2020).

### Vocabulary

Reading requires the ability to map printed words onto stored phonological and semantic representations of spoken words (Brynes & Wasik, 2019). Students with well developed vocabularies have an easier time recognizing and understanding the words they read (Moats, 2020). Schmitt et al. (2011 & 2017) claimed that in order to comprehend a text, students should know at least 95–98% of the words in the text. When students know less than 95% of the words, reading is slower and takes more effort and students struggle to understand the text. The following example from Benevides (2015) demonstrates how reading becomes laborious and frustrating when students cannot comprehend the majority of the words.

**98% Comprehensible:** Reader can usually figure out the few words they don't know.

You live and work in Tokyo. Tokyo is a big city. More than 13 million people live around you. You are never *borgle*, but you are always lonely. Every morning, you get up and take the train to work. Every night, you take the train again to go home. The train is always crowded. When people ask about your work, you tell them, "I move papers around." It's a joke, but it's also true. You don't like your work. Tonight you are returning home. It's late at night. No one is *shnooling*. Sometimes you don't see a *shnool* all day. You are tired. You are so tired...

**95% Comprehensible:** Reader must apply more effort to understand, and their reading tends to be slower and less enjoyable.

In the morning, you start again. You shower, get dressed, and walk *pocklent*. You move slowly, half awake. Then, suddenly, you stop. Something is different. The streets are *fossit*. Really *fossit*. There are no people. No cars. Nothing. "Where is *dowargle*?" you ask yourself. Suddenly, there is a loud *quapen*—a police car. It speeds by and almost hits you. It crashes into a store across the street! Then, another police car *farfoofles*. The police officer sees you. "Off the street!" he shouts. "Go home, lock your door!" "What? Why?" you shout back. But it's too late. He is gone.

**80% Comprehensible:** Reader becomes frustrated because there are too many words to figure out and comprehension is very difficult.

"*Bingle* for help!" you shout. "This *loopity* is dying!" You put your fingers on her neck. Nothing. Her *flid* is not *weafling*. You take out your *joople* and *bingle* 119, the emergency number in Japan. There's no answer! Then you *muchy* that you have a new *befourn as-sengle*. It's from your *gutring*, Evie. She *hunwres* at Tokyo University. You play the *assen-gle*. "...if you get this..." Evie says. "...I can't *vickarn* now... the important *passit* is..." Suddenly, she looks around, *dingle*. "Oh no, they're here! *Cripett*... the *frib*! *Wasple* them ON THE *FRIB*!..." BEEP! the *assen-gle parantles*. Then you *gratoon* something behind you...

In this example Benevides (2015) replaced certain words in the text with nonsense words to demonstrate how reading quickly becomes frustrating when students do not possess the vocabulary to understand the text.

Children can increase their vocabulary by listening to videos, participating in conversations, playing games that require listening and speaking, singing songs, and listening to and reading books. After children have learned to read, one of the primary ways they acquire vocabulary is through reading (Murray, 2016). Oral language and reading have a reciprocal relationship (Morrow et al., 2016). Initially students must use their vocabulary knowledge to comprehend text. Later on, students read to learn new vocabulary words. If children know the majority of the words in a text, it is easier for them to figure out the meaning of words they do not recognize. However, if reading becomes too laborious and frustrating, students tend to spend less time reading and lose opportunities to learn new vocabulary (Lundberg, 2002). This is a cycle that is often difficult to break and keeps struggling readers from progressing.

## Language Structures/Syntax

Syntax is the set of rules for how words are structured and arranged within sentences. As mentioned earlier, most children begin learning syntax, or basic grammar rules, from listening to and participating in conversations (Fredman, 2022). For example, most young children will start to understand that a noun comes after the articles *a* or *an* or that adjectives come before a noun. Understanding the rules of oral language helps with comprehending written language. The following example from Fredman (2022) illustrates how children use their understanding of language structures as they read.

Look at the sentence: **The exhausted mother came home from work.** The word “exhausted” is the most difficult to decode. A child with a good understanding of syntax will be able to read the rest of the sentence and guess that the tricky word before mother should describe or be related to the mother, thus limiting the options for what that unknown word might be: maybe “exhausted,” “excited,” “excellent.” But a child who struggles with syntax may not have this information to help her figure out the tricky word. For this child, the unknown word could just as easily be “expect,” “extremely,” or “exit” – whereas a child with understanding of syntax would rule out these options because they don’t make sense with the word order of the rest of the sentence.

Understanding syntax gives children an advantage when reading by providing rules that can be used to facilitate comprehension.

## Verbal Reasoning

Understanding spoken language is not merely knowing the words that are used; it includes the ability to infer meaning from what is said or implied (Moats, 2020). There are many nuances in a conversation that influence the meaning of what is said. Speakers use facial expressions, hand gestures, and tone of voice to help convey meaning. Speakers also use idioms, analogies, figurative language, and cultural references that can affect comprehension. The more experience a child has with language, the more likely they will pick up on the social and cultural nuances of the language and comprehend what is being said.

Reading is not merely decoding and comprehending words in a text. Reading also requires the ability to “read between the lines.” Just like speaking, reading requires students to look beyond what is explicitly written to consider what the author is implying (Scarborough, 2001). Verbal reasoning helps readers understand when words are being used literally or figuratively so the reader can interpret the text accurately (Scarborough, 2001). For instance, if a student reads the sentence, “She put all her eggs in one basket,” and is not familiar with the idiom, the student might interpret the sentence literally and be confused about why someone is suddenly putting eggs in a basket. Verbal reasoning is the ability to analyze and think about the words in a text and accurately interpret what the author intended to convey.

## Literacy Knowledge

Literacy knowledge includes understanding basic print concepts like letters vs words, reading from left to right and top to bottom, and understanding that there are spaces between written words. Most children become aware of print before they learn to read. Children see print in their environment on signs and billboards, on food labels and objects, in books and newspapers, and on TV (Reading Rockets, 2022). Seeing print helps children recognize how print is structured and used in various forms. Literacy knowledge also helps children understand that print has different purposes depending on how it is used. Print can be used for various reasons, such as informing, persuading, or entertaining. Understanding basic print concepts and the theme or purpose of a text gives students a better chance of successfully comprehending it.

To summarize, learning to read is a complex process that involves the coordination of several skills, including phonemic awareness, letter sound correspondence, recognizing words by sight, and the ability to understand the meaning of words and text as a whole (Morrow et al., 2016). If students cannot recognize the words in a text with accuracy and automaticity, fluency will be affected and reading comprehension will suffer. Similarly, if students do not understand the meaning of the words or sentences, reading comprehension will suffer. Both word recognition and language comprehension skills are essential for students to develop reading comprehension.

In the past, many educators believed that teaching reading skills happened in a specific order: first students learned to read, and then they developed comprehension skills. One of the key principles of the rope metaphor is that word recognition and language comprehension are not sequential. Rather, they are skills that should be taught concurrently. Gough and Turner's SVR formula and Scarborough's Reading Rope clearly illustrate how word recognition and language comprehension skills interact and build on each other to create fluid and natural reading.

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## Variations in Language Learning Environments

Many oral language skills are acquired naturally which is why most adults could not tell you how they learned to speak. Language development starts earlier than many people realize. Humans begin developing their oral language skills from the time they are born. Babies listen to the sounds and language spoken by their parents and begin making cooing sounds and babbling soon after they are born (Byrnes & Wasik, 2019). During their first months of life, children start learning the speech sounds of their native language, and they categorize the sounds according to patterns (Lundberg, 2002). Around 12–18 months children are typically able to use the sound categories to make words (Shanahan, 2016; Lundberg, 2002), and around 2–3 years, most children are able to speak in complete sentences (Byrnes & Wasik, 2019). During the first few years of life, the language development process happens naturally without much instruction from adults.

Although oral language development is a natural process, there is substantial variation in children's language learning environments prior to entering public school, and these variations have a profound impact on children's confidence and abilities to acquire the literacy skills needed to succeed in school (Justice, Jian & Strasser, 2018). When a child whose home language is not primarily English enters school, they tend to fall behind their peers in reading and usually have greater difficulty becoming proficient readers (Moats, 2020; Byrnes & Wasik, 2019). Children who come from homes that don't speak English have the challenge of learning a new language while simultaneously trying to learn other academic skills. These students must become extremely efficient in learning English in order to catch up to their peers (Lesaux & Harris, 2021).

Recently, increased attention has been given to preschool as an essential time for developing skills that children need to succeed in school (Wasik et al., 2006). During preschool, English Language Arts (ELA) should focus on oral language, with the goal of expanding children's speaking and listening skills, so students have a solid foundation for learning to read and write (Morrow et al., 2016). Preschool curriculum should include a variety of oral language skills, including word knowledge, expressive and receptive vocabulary, word order and grammatical rules (Dickinson & Porsche, 2011), as well as conceptual knowledge and narrative discourse (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

## Joy School English Overview

Although research has clearly established the need for teaching oral language in preschool, most digital language arts programs focus on literacy skills and exclude oral language components. Joy School English is a research-based, digital program developed by Alegra Learning to help preschool and kindergarten aged children learn English and basic word recognition skills. While most digital programs focus on literacy, Joy School English emphasizes speaking and listening skills that are essential for learning to read and write.

English learners need numerous opportunities to speak and to be spoken to in order to strengthen their speaking and listening skills (Byrnes & Wasik, 2019). However, according to the Center for Applied Statistics, English learners spend less than 2 percent of their school day participating in oral interactions (Walqui & Heritage, 2018). The Joy School English app provides thousands of opportunities for these children to speak English in a low-stress environment. Students work independently on the app, which is full of unique books, activities, videos, songs, and games. Each activity is carefully crafted to effectively teach students and keep them engaged in the learning process. Speech recognition software is used to analyze the students' speech and deliver a personalized learning experience. Through strategic use of speech recognition, native speaker videos, question prompts, and recording features, students get feedback and constant practice speaking and listening.

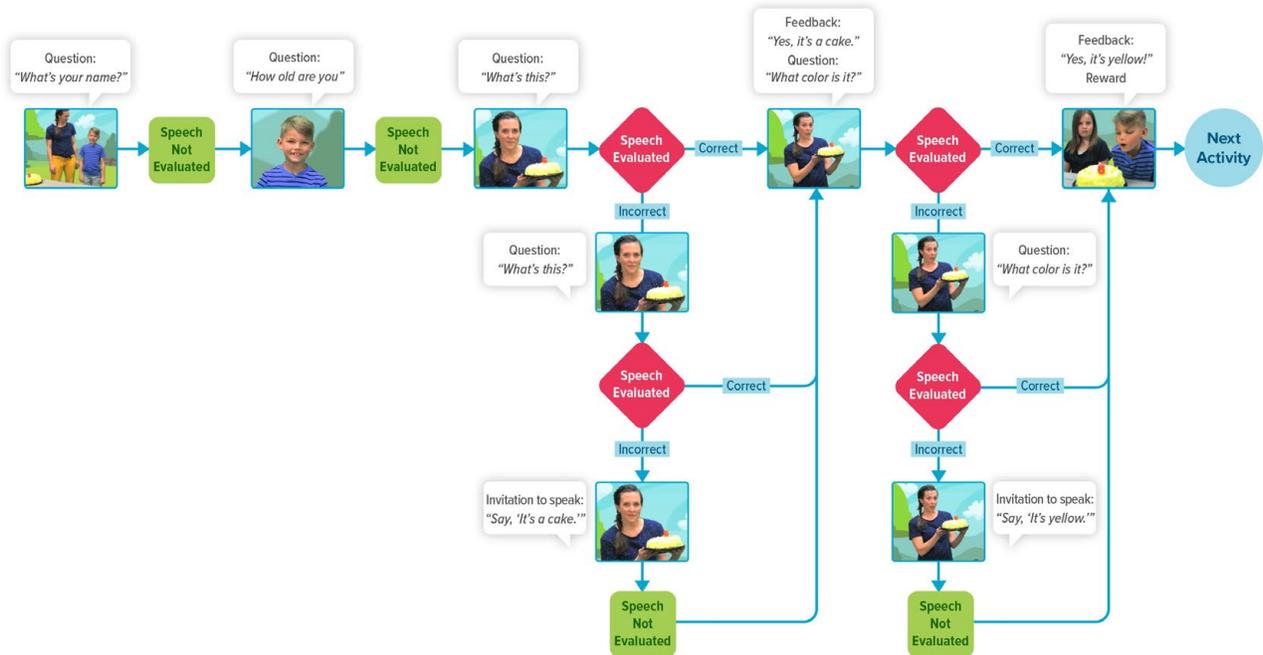
*Ex. 1: Listen, Practice, Repeat — Native English speakers teach and model the words and phrases. The student practices saying the words and phrases, and speech recognition evaluates the accuracy of the student's response. If the student struggles to say something accurately, the native models repeat the phrase slowly and encourage the student to try again.*



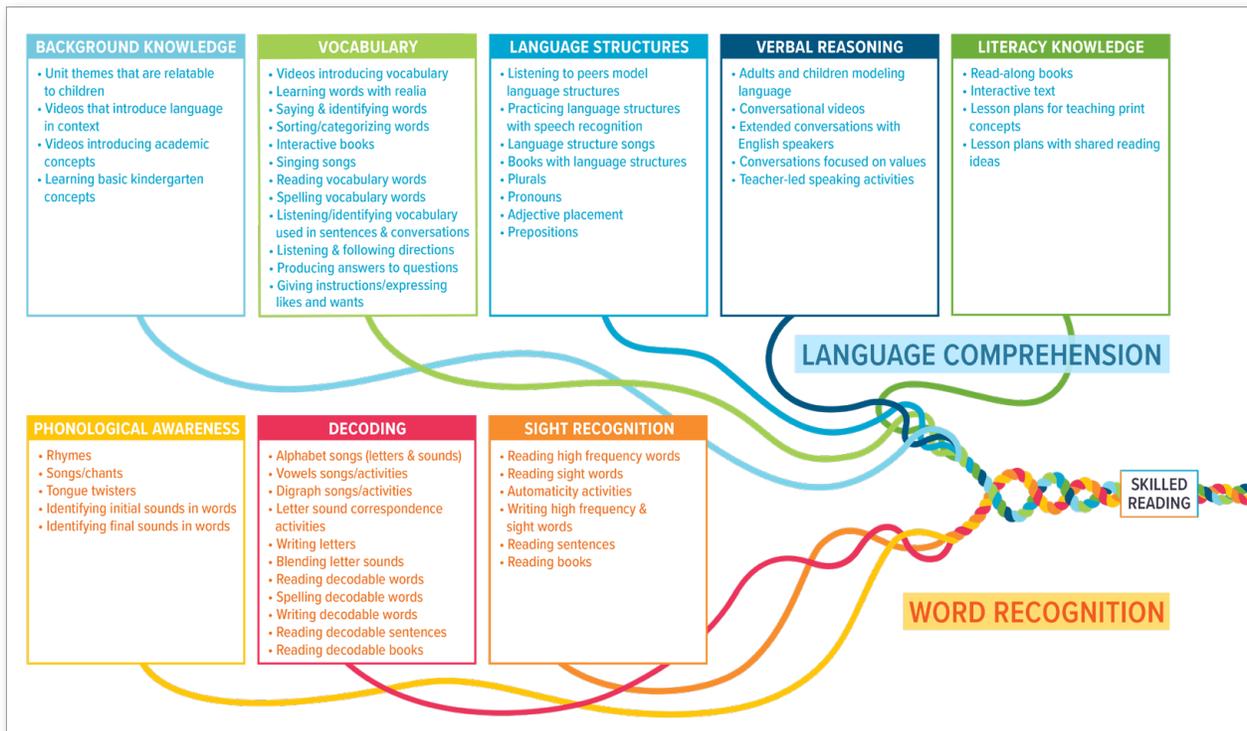
*Ex. 2: Answer Questions — Students interact with a character named Miss Daisy who teaches a principle and asks them questions. Based on the accuracy of the student's response, Miss Daisy will reteach the principle, re-ask the question, or congratulate the student and progress the activity.*



*Ex. 3: Adaptive Sequence — Speech recognition is used to create customized learning paths for students. For instance, Miss Daisy asks the student, "What's this?" and waits for a response. If the student answers correctly, Miss Daisy continues the conversation by responding to the student and asking another question. If the student answers incorrectly, Miss Daisy repeats the question. If the student answers incorrectly a third time, Miss Daisy helps the student say the correct answer.*

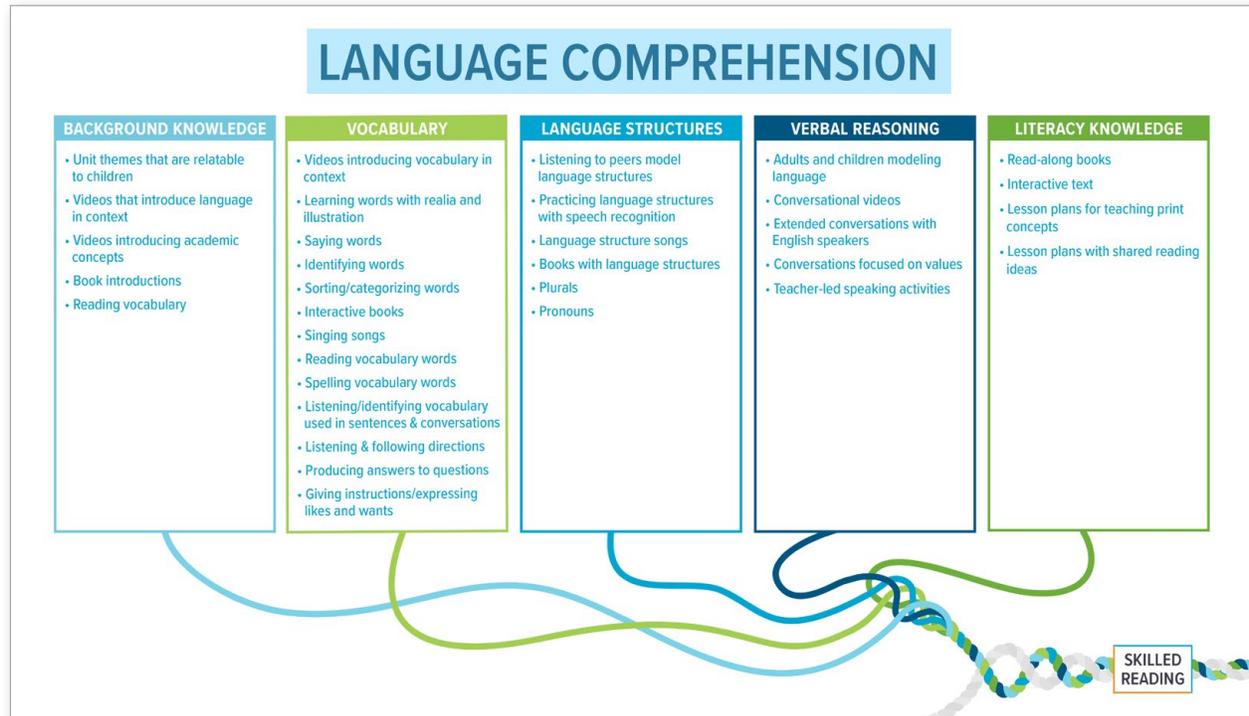


While the primary focus of Joy School English is to help students develop oral language skills, the program also teaches basic literacy skills. Joy School English includes phonological awareness activities like songs, rhymes, tongue twisters, and identifying the initial and ending sounds in words. Students also participate in reading activities that help them build decoding skills and learn to read sight words. The following diagram shows how Joy School English teaches both the foundational language and literacy skills needed to prepare children to read and write.



## Language Comprehension

Students with weak oral language skills struggle to keep up with their peers in later years (Biemiller, 2006; Dougherty, 2014; Hart & Risely, 2003; Scarborough, 2001). Without adequate levels of oral language, it is difficult for students to comprehend written text (Moats, 2020). Students must be able to 1) understand words in their spoken form, 2) parse syntactic and semantic relationships among words, and 3) apply their background knowledge on the topic (Scarborough, 2001). The following sections will discuss how Joy School English helps students develop these language skills.



### BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Students use background knowledge to make sense of what they are reading (Murray, 2016). Having knowledge about a variety of subjects, topics, and ideas makes it more likely that students will be able to comprehend a story or text. Joy School English helps students build background knowledge through units based on themes that are relatable and useful for young children. Joy School English also teaches basic preschool and kindergarten concepts, like shapes, colors, numbers, calendar, and time. Students also learn about various cultures from around the world as they listen to other children talk about the countries they are from. All of these activities and experiences help students build background knowledge that can be accessed when students begin reading.

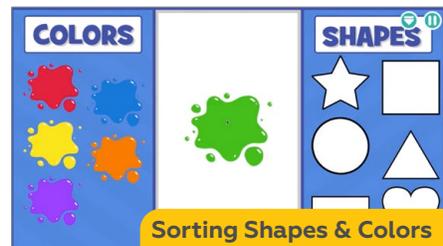
### Relatable Themes

Students watch short videos where fluent English peers model a conversational phrase or sentence structure and the unit's target vocabulary. The videos represent authentic, age-appropriate communicative experiences that students easily relate to. The purpose of the video is to establish a clear context for the language that will be learned in the unit.



### Basic Concepts

Miss Daisy introduces and reviews basic preschool and kindergarten concepts with the students such as shapes, numbers, colors, time, and calendar.



## Cultures

Students learn about different cultures. In this activity, children from other countries call and talk with a Joy School English character. The children talk about their country, some of their hobbies, and their favorite things.

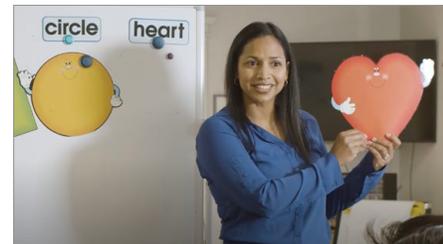


## VOCABULARY

Students with well developed vocabularies have an easier time recognizing and understanding the words they read (Moats, 2020). Students will not comprehend a written word if they do not understand it in its verbal form (Scarborough, 2001). Joy School English teaches vocabulary using research-based best practices. Vocabulary words are age appropriate and relevant to the student, so the words can be immediately put into practice. English speakers model how the words are used within sentences and conversations, which allows students to connect to and understand words in a more meaningful way. Below is a sample sequence of how students learn and practice using vocabulary words.

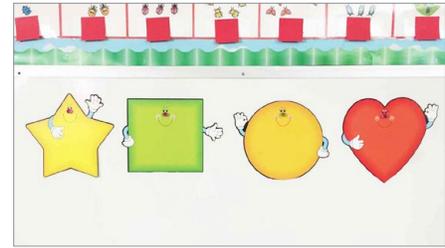
### Watch a Conversation Where Vocabulary Words are Modeled

Students watch a short video where fluent English speakers model the vocabulary in a conversation. The videos represent authentic, age-appropriate communicative experiences that students will easily relate to. The purpose of the video is to establish a clear context for both the new language structures and vocabulary words.



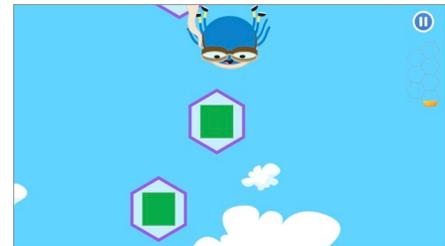
### Learn to Pronounce Vocabulary Words

After watching the conversational video, students learn several vocabulary words that were used in the conversation. Students see the vocabulary in actual photos taken from the video. The vocabulary represented by realia helps anchor the meaning of the words. When students tap each object, they hear the word and are asked to say the word. Speech recognition is used to evaluate their pronunciation, and if it is incorrect, the student will have two more opportunities to hear the word and practice saying it.



### Practice Saying and Identifying Vocabulary Words

Throughout each unit, students participate in several activities where they practice saying and identifying the vocabulary words. Speech recognition is used to provide feedback on students' pronunciations. If students struggle to pronounce words correctly, they are given additional opportunities to listen to the correct pronunciation and say the word again.



### Read a Book with Vocabulary Words

Students engage with narrated digital picture books that include the unit vocabulary words. In the first encounter with the book, there is no print on the pages. This allows students to focus on the audio and illustrations in order to comprehend the story. Stories are animated to facilitate comprehension, and the books are interactive. Students can tap illustrations and text to hear the words they represent.



### Sing Songs with Vocabulary Words

Joy School English is full of songs that use vocabulary words. Students watch a video of children doing actions to a song or watch an animated video supporting the target phrase and vocabulary. Then students are asked to sing-along and record themselves.

Star, circle, heart, and square,  
Look for these shapes everywhere.  
Star, circle, heart, and square,  
Shapes are everywhere!  
Star, circle, heart, and square,  
Look for these shapes everywhere.  
Star, circle, heart, and square,  
Shapes are everywhere!



### Review Vocabulary Words

Vocabulary words are strategically brought back in future units and grade levels to facilitate retention. In this activity, Miss Daisy is talking with the students and asking them if they remember the shapes they learned in a previous grade level of Joy School English.



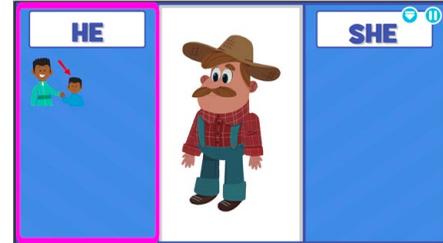
### LANGUAGE STRUCTURES/SYNTAX

Syntax is the grammar rules for how a language combines words and structures sentences to convey meaning (Cain 2007; Nation & Snowling, 2000). English learners will have acquired language skills in their first language but will need additional time and practice to learn the words and grammar rules of a new language (Roskos & Gambrell, 2016). English learners should participate in language that includes more complex grammatical structures, such as contractions (I'm, we're, they're); pronouns (she, he, they, it); structures that imply consequence, comparison, and temporal order (if...then, because...like and different...first, next...); and compound and complex sentences (Morrow et al., 2016). These types of structures will

help students expand their grammatical awareness and build a bridge to written text. Joy School English was specifically designed to help English learners acquire new vocabulary and learn English language structures as well as grammar concepts such as pronouns, contractions, adjective placement, prepositions, antonyms, and comparisons.

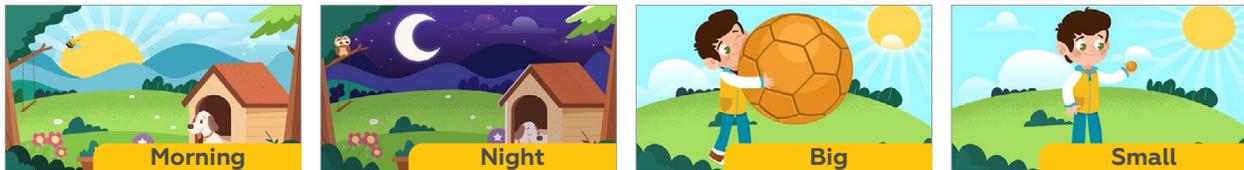
### Pronouns

Students learn about pronouns. In this activity, students practice identifying and sorting the pronouns “he” and “she.” Students listen to the pronoun used in a complete sentence, “He is a farmer.” Then students drag the image to the correct location.



### Antonyms and Comparisons

Students learn high utility words that are best understood in relation to each other, such as the instructional words same/different and the descriptive words morning/night. Students practice saying the words, and when the word is said correctly, the picture changes to match the word the student said.

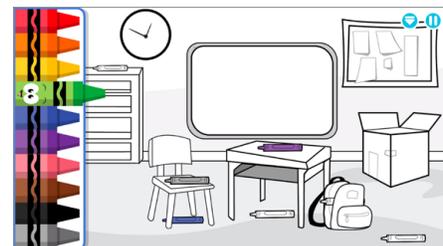


### Nouns, Adjectives, and Prepositions

In these activities, students listen and discriminate between nouns, adjectives, and prepositions. In the first activity, students demonstrate their understanding of vocabulary words and prepositions of place by finding specific items and placing them in the described location. In the second activity, students show their understanding of colors and prepositions of place. They listen to a short dialogue between an adult and child and identify the object spoken about by listening to the details of its position. Then students color the object.

Where’s the pencil?  
Put the pencil in the bowl.

Do you see the pen under the chair?  
Yes. I see the pen under the chair.  
Color the pen under the chair blue.  
Okay.



### Listen to and Practice Saying Language Structures

*This activity provides multiple opportunities for students to see children and adults model the language structures. Students then practice saying the structures on their own with feedback from speech recognition. Students learn and practice saying questions and statements that can help them receive information, state preferences, clarify something, and ask for help.*



### Sing Songs with Language Structures

*Students sing songs that include the grammar structures to help build fluency. In this song, students learn about plurals and when to use "this" vs "these."*

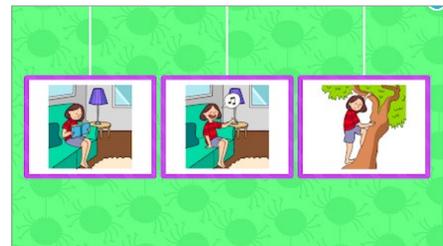
*This is a zebra.  
These are zebras.*



### Listen and understand a Conversation

*Students listen to the language structures, which include pronouns, contractions, adjectives, and more, then show comprehension by selecting the corresponding images. Students start with single phrases and work their way up to comprehending conversations.*

*Where's Lucy?  
She's in the living room.  
What's she doing?  
She's singing a song.*



## Participate in a Conversation

Students put the language structures they have learned into practice with a real-world scenario played out with Miss Daisy. Students help Miss Daisy by answering her questions. Based on the accuracy of the student's response, Miss Daisy will reask the question or congratulate the student and progress the activity.

What's your name?

How old are you?

What's this?

What color is it?



## VERBAL REASONING

Understanding spoken language is not merely knowing the words that are used; it's also the ability to infer meaning from what is said or implied (Moats, 2020). The same is true for reading. Reading requires the ability to look beyond what is explicitly written and consider what the author is trying to imply. The more experience a child has with language, the more likely they will pick up on the social and cultural nuances of language. Parents and teachers can facilitate the development of verbal reasoning by talking about rate of speech, tones of voice, and body language as well as by helping students understand metaphors, idioms, analogies, and figurative language. The following activities are designed to help students with verbal reasoning.

## Social Nuances of Language

Miss Daisy and Professor Puffin talk to the students and ask them questions. The characters are very animated and model facial expressions, gestures, tone, turn taking, and appropriate use of vocabulary.



### Extended Conversations

Students are placed in real-world conversations through the use of speech recognition technology and video recordings. Students chat back and forth in extended video conversations with the Joy School English characters.

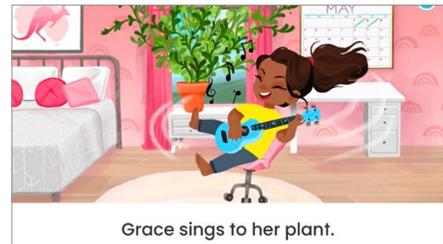


### LITERACY KNOWLEDGE

Students with literacy knowledge understand basic print concepts such as letters vs words, print directionality, and book handling, and they understand that texts are organized in specific ways. Literacy knowledge also includes the awareness that text can be a variety of genres such as poetry, fairy tales, concept books, informational books, etc. When students understand basic print concepts and the genre or purpose of a text, they have a better chance of successfully comprehending it. Joy School English teaches basic print concepts and gives students exposure to a variety of texts.

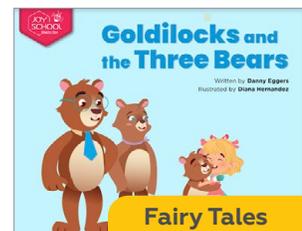
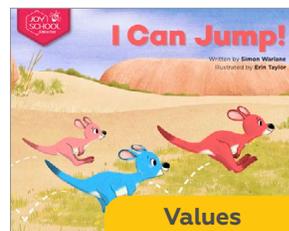
#### Print Concepts

Joy School English has over one hundred interactive audio books. Students participate in shared reading experiences that facilitate understanding of basic print concepts including title, author, illustrator, turning pages from right to left, reading text from left to right, awareness of letters making up words, and awareness of text corresponding to words in their oral vocabulary.



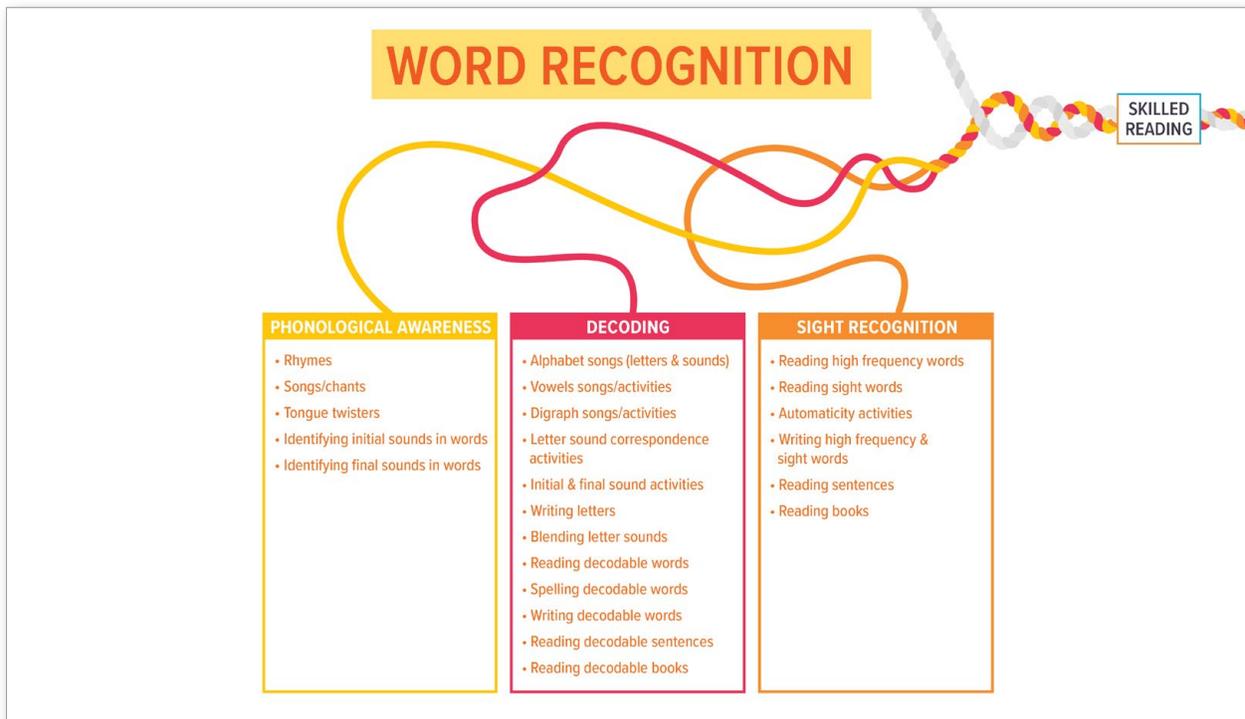
#### Variety of Texts

Joy School English exposes students to a variety of texts (e.g., narrative, informational, rhyming, concept, fairy tales, values). Students listen to books as they are read aloud and participate in shared reading activities.



## Word Recognition

Although Joy School English has a significant emphasis on oral language, it also teaches basic word recognition skills. The goal for word recognition is to help children move from sounding out words to accurate and automatic word reading. When word recognition is accurate and automatic, students are able to use their cognitive efforts to comprehend the text (Garnett, 2011). Scarborough's Reading Rope includes three word recognition skills: 1) phonological awareness, 2) decoding, and 3) sight recognition. The next sections will discuss how Joy School English helps students develop these skills.



### PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate sounds in a spoken language. Research demonstrates that phonological awareness plays a vital role in helping young children learn to decode words (Castles & Coltheart, 2004). Students with high levels of phonological skills by age 3 or 4 are usually the best readers in first grade (Byrnes & Wasik, 2019). Beginning readers benefit from instruction that teaches them to hear the sounds within words. This is especially true for English learners who may be learning some of the sounds for the first time. When children can hear the sounds within words, they are better prepared to decode words (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The National Reading Panel (2000) recommends keeping phonological awareness teaching simple, brief, and fun. Phonological awareness skills can be taught through games, songs, tongue twisters, rhymes, and chants. For English learners in particular, these activities can help them use their new language orally for the first time (Morrow et al., 2016). The following activities demonstrate how Joy School English reinforces phonological awareness.

## Songs and Chants

Joy School English has over 100 songs and chants. As students listen and sing along, they gain the ability to recognize rhyme and hear and manipulate sounds in words. Many of the songs and chants have actions to help with memory and recall of the vocabulary and language structures. The first activity on the right is an animated song. Students listen to the song, practice singing, and record themselves. The next activity is a chant that is being led by the teacher during a small group lesson.

### SONG

Where's the spider?

It's on the chair.

It's by the bear.

The spider's on the chair.

The spider's by the bear.

Stop, spider. Stop.

Stop, spider. STOP!

### CHANT

Stand up. Sit down.

Stand up. Sit down.

Stand up and turn around.

Clap your hands and sit down.



## Tongue Twisters

Students practice saying tongue twisters at different speeds to improve fluency and learn alliteration. Joy School English has tongue twisters for each letter of the alphabet to focus on specific sounds and improve students' letter discrimination and pronunciation.



Rat and Rabbit ran in the rain while  
Rhino and Robin rode in a plane.



Kate likes keys, kites, and kangaroos.  
Kate likes koalas and kittens too.

## Rhyme

Joy School English includes rhyme in books, songs, chants, and other activities. These experiences prepare students to notice and work with the different sounds in words.

### RHYMING BOOKS

*Turtle loves his blanket. His soft, blue blanket.  
He takes it to the store. He lays it on the floor.  
He takes it down the slide. He gives his toys a ride.  
He ties it to his chair. He takes it everywhere.  
Turtle loves his blanket. His soft, blue blanket.  
Then, one day he trips, and his blanket rips.  
Can he fix the hole with glue? What will Turtle do?  
Turtle's brother is so smart. To fix the hole, he sews a heart.  
Turtle loves his blanket. His soft, blue blanket.*

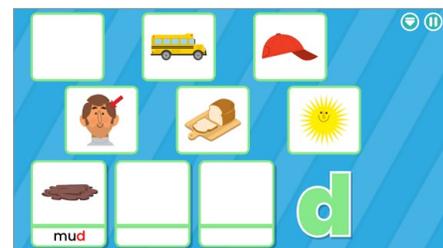
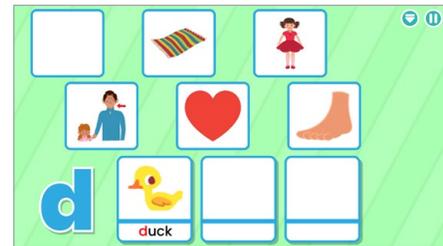


### RHYMING SONGS

*Who is this? Who is this?  
This is my grandma. She's really fun.  
This is my grandpa. He likes to run.  
This is the baby in our family.  
Who is this? Who is this?  
Oh look, it's me.*

## Initial and Final Sounds

Students learn to discriminate between sounds by identifying words that start or end with a specific initial or final sound. In the activities to the right, students tap each picture to hear the word pronounced and then decide if the word begins or ends with the target sound.



## DECODING

Decoding is an essential skill for learning to read. It requires the ability to apply the knowledge of letter sound correspondence to accurately pronounce written words. Some children learn to decode easily, but most children benefit from explicit instruction (Armbruster et al., 2006). Teachers can strengthen decoding skills by teaching letter sound correspondence, vowels, blends, digraphs, word parts, syllables, and other phonics skills. Joy School English teaches basic phonics skills to help children begin reading.

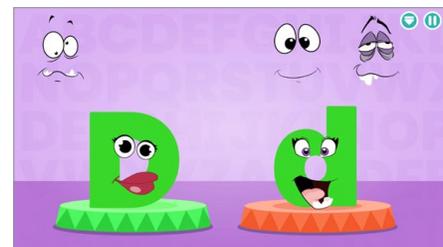
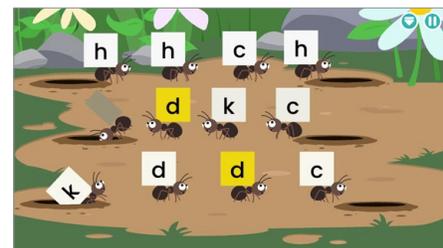
### Letter Songs

Students practice the letter names and sounds in fun songs. In the song shown here students do actions that start with the letter sound, such as dancing, jumping, clapping, waving, etc. The body movements help activate the frontal cortex and strengthen memory.



### Letter Sound Correspondence

Students learn and practice letter sound correspondence by participating in several activities where they match letters to sounds. Students also practice saying the letter sounds that match a given letter. Students are able to hear their recording of the letter sound and compare it to a native English speaker's pronunciation.



## Digraphs

Students are introduced to digraphs and the concept that sometimes two letters together make a single sound. Joy School English has songs to teach the digraphs th, sh, ch, qu, wh, and ph. After learning about the digraphs, students participate in activities where they identify words with the digraph at the beginning or end of the word.

### SONG

S - H /sh/ /sh/ /sh/

S - H /sh/ /sh/ /sh/

S - H /sh/ /sh/ /sh/

Let's say these words together:

fish, brush, wash

### ACTIVITY

Find words that end with the sound /sh/.



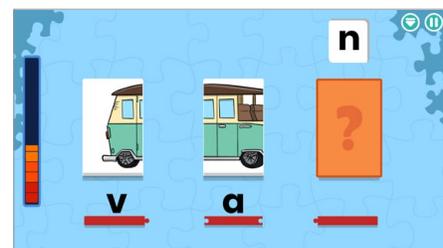
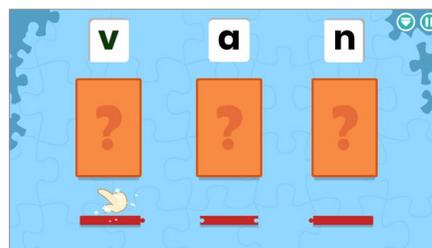
## Vowels

Joy School English has a song for each of the vowels to help students remember which letters are vowels. After the song is played, students participate in an activity where they practice identifying the vowels.



## Introduction to Blending

In this activity, students combine puzzle pieces associated with letters that create an image of the word. Students say each individual letter sound then blend the letter sounds until all the sounds are combined into the full word. Speech recognition is used to provide feedback to the student.



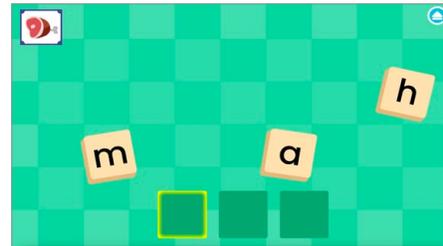
## Blending Letter Sounds to Read Words

In the first activity on the right, students say and blend letter sounds to read words aloud. The next activity requires students to read decodable words and select the text that matches the image. These activities teach students to read decodable words that will appear in a book at the end of the unit.



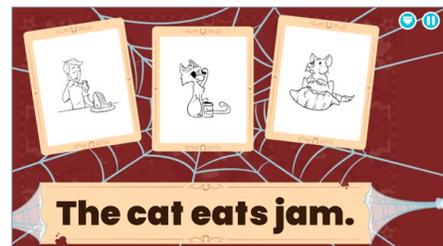
## Spell Decodable Words

Students practice spelling the decodable words they have been learning to read. In this activity, students identify the image and then arrange the letter tiles to spell the word.



## Reading Decodable Sentences

Students practice reading sentences that contain the decodable and sight words they have learned to read and spell. Speech recognition is used to make sure the student can read the sentence accurately. Then the student selects the image that matches the sentence.



### Read a Decodable Book

Students read a decodable book that contains the decodable words and sight words they learned in the unit. Students encounter the book multiple times. At the beginning of the unit, the book is read aloud to the students. After the students learn to read the decodable and sight words, they practice reading the book. At the end of the unit, students read aloud and record themselves. The recording is saved and can be reviewed in the Teacher Portal.



### SIGHT RECOGNITION

Sight word recognition is the ability to see a familiar word and instantly process it. Our sight word memory includes all the words we can read accurately and effortlessly without decoding. It is recommended to teach sight words as early as preschool because it helps students build confidence and reduces frustration when reading (Yaw, 2012). When students are able to read the majority of words in a text with automaticity and accuracy, their reading becomes more fluent and takes less effort (Mulé et al., 2018). Without sight word vocabularies, students are forced to spend the majority of their energy decoding each word, rather than understanding what the text means as a whole (Simonton, 2019). Joy School English has several activities that help students read high frequency words by sight.

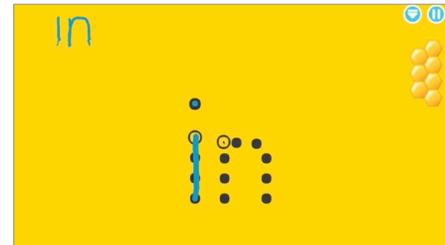
### Learn Sight Words

Students are introduced to several new sight words in each unit. Students listen to the words used in a sentence and learn how the words are spelled.



### Trace/Write Sight Words

Students practice writing sight words by tracing on top of the letter guides. Students trace the words several times and gradually the guides are removed until the student is writing the words on their own.



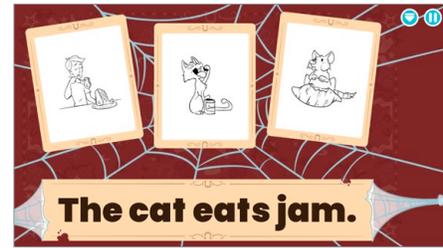
### Reading Sight Words

Students participate in automaticity activities to help them recognize sight words quickly. In this activity, an audio recording of one of the sight words is played and students tap the matching text. The activity speeds up and slows down depending on how well the student is doing.



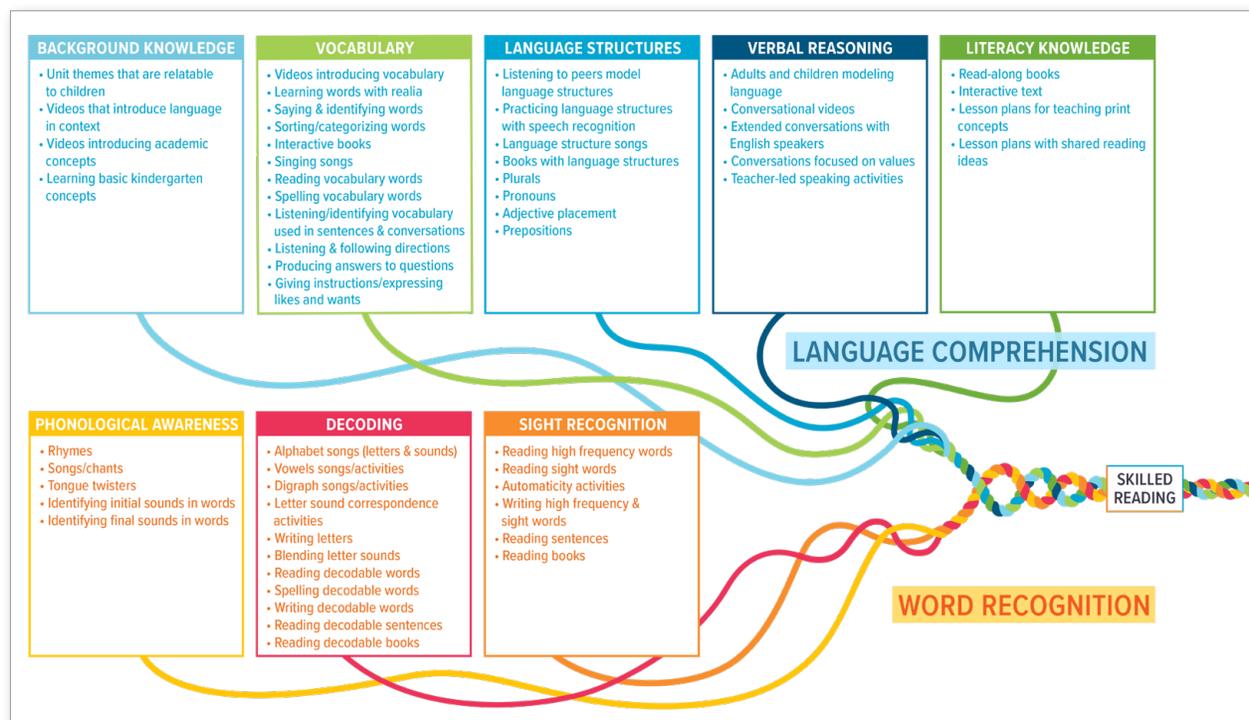
## Read Sentences and Books with Sight Words

As mentioned previously, students read sentences and a decodable book that contains both decodable and sight words at the end of each unit. At the beginning of the unit, the book is read aloud to the students. After the students learn to read the decodable and sight words, they practice reading the book. At the end of the unit, students read aloud and record themselves.



## Conclusion

Research has clearly established the need for teaching young children both oral language and word recognition skills. However, most digital language arts programs focus on literacy skills and exclude oral language components. Joy School English is a digital program developed for preschool and kindergarten aged children with a specific emphasis on oral language. The Joy School English app provides thousands of opportunities for children to speak English in a low-stress environment. Students work independently on a mobile app that is full of both oral language and literacy activities, all carefully crafted to effectively help students speak and progress at their own pace. Joy School English is used in over 6,500 classes across 29 countries and has proven to be effective at helping young children learn English and gain the foundational literacy skills that are essential for academic success.



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