

## Effective Beginning Reading Programs

Last Updated June 23, 2009

What beginning reading programs\* have been proven to help students in grades K-1 to succeed? To find out, this review summarizes evidence on four types of programs designed to improve beginning reading achievement:

- **Reading Curricula (Curr)**, such as *Open Court Reading*, *Reading Street*, and other standard and alternative textbooks.
- **Instructional Technology (IT)**, such as *Waterford*, *Phonics-Based Reading*, and *Writing to Read*.
- **Instructional Process Programs (IP)**, such as cooperative learning and phonological awareness training.
- **Combined Curriculum and Instructional Process Programs (Curr & IP)**, such as *Success for All* and *Direct Instruction*.

### General Findings

Overall, 63 experimental-control comparisons met the inclusion criteria, of which 19 used random assignment to treatments. Effect sizes (experimental-control differences as a proportion of a standard deviation) were averaged across studies, weighting by sample size.

**Reading Curricula (Curr).** Studies of reading curricula found minimal effects of using particular textbooks. Mean weighted effect size across 7 studies: +0.12.

**Instructional Technology (IT).** Studies of IT also found minimal effects. Mean weighted effect size across 13 studies: +0.09.

**Instructional Process Programs (IP).** Studies of programs that provide extensive professional development to help teachers use well-specified teaching methods had relatively positive effects overall. Mean weighted effect size across 17 studies: +0.37. Particularly positive effects were found for cooperative learning (ES=+0.46), phonics-focused professional development

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\* Note: This review focuses on initial (non-remedial) reading programs. A review of research on programs for struggling readers is also available on the BEE at [www.bestevidence.org/reading/strug/strug\\_read.htm](http://www.bestevidence.org/reading/strug/strug_read.htm).


(ES=+0.43), and teaching of phonological awareness to kindergartners (ES=+0.22 at the end of first or second grades).



**Combined Curriculum and Instructional Process Programs (Curr & IP).** Programs that combine innovative phonetic materials with extensive professional development for teachers found positive effects overall. In particular, positive effects were found for *Success for All* (ES=+0.29 in 23 studies).

## Program Ratings

Listed below are currently available programs, grouped by strength of effectiveness. Within each group, programs are listed alphabetically. The type for each program corresponds to the categories above (e.g., IP = Instructional Process Strategies).

### Strong Evidence of Effectiveness




Rating	Program	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)	IP	A technique in which children work in pairs, taking turns as teacher and learner, to learn a structured sequence of literacy skills, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, sound blending, passage reading, and story retelling.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:pals@vanderbilt.edu">pals@vanderbilt.edu</a> Website: <a href="http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals">kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals</a>

Rating	Program	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Reading Reels	IP	A form of multimedia used within the Success for All program (see below), in which video content is embedded within teachers' lessons. Brief animation, puppet skits, and live-action segments, about five minutes daily in total, model beginning reading strategies for children and teachers.	E-mail: sfainfo@successforall.org Website: www.successforall.org
	Success for All	Curr + IP	Provides schools with a K-5 reading curriculum that focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and vocabulary development, beginning with phonetically-controlled mini-books in grades K-1. Cooperative learning is extensively used at all grade levels. Tutoring is provided to struggling readers, and parent involvement is encouraged.	E-mail: sfainfo@successforall.org Website: www.successforall.org





**Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness**

 **None**

**Limited Evidence of Effectiveness: Strong Evidence of Modest Effects**

Rating	Program	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Direct Instruction	Curr + IP	An approach to beginning reading instruction that emphasizes a step-by-step approach to phonics, decodable texts that make use of a unique initial teaching alphabet, and structured, scripted manuals for teachers.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:info@nifdi.org">info@nifdi.org</a> Website: <a href="http://www.nifdi.org">www.nifdi.org</a>
	Open Court Reading	Curr	A basal text book series that uses phonetic readers in early grades, a focus on direct instruction of specific skills throughout the program, scripted teachers' manuals, teacher training, and follow-up.	Complete contact form at: <a href="http://www.sraonline.com/customer_service_feedback.html">www.sraonline.com/customer_service_feedback.html</a> Website: <a href="http://www.sraonline.com/oc_home.html">www.sraonline.com/oc_home.html</a>
	Scholastic Phonics Readers with Literacy Place	Curr	A supplementary phonics instructional program designed as an optional addition to Literacy Place, Scholastic's basal reading text, that incorporates phonetic texts to provide intensive phonics practice in the context of engaging stories.	Complete contact form at: <a href="http://www.scholastic.com/custsupport/contact_us.htm">www.scholastic.com/custsupport/contact_us.htm</a> Website: <a href="http://teacher.scholastic.com/literacyplace">teacher.scholastic.com/literacyplace</a>




**Limited Evidence of Effectiveness: Weak Evidence with Notable Effects**



Rating	Program	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Classwide Peer Tutoring	IP	A cooperative learning approach in which children regularly work in pairs, engage in structured tutoring activities, and frequently reverse roles.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:greenwood@ku.edu">greenwood@ku.edu</a>
	Early Reading Research	IP	A whole-class reading program in which children are taught as a whole class, rather than in small reading groups. Teachers are given professional development in structured, systematic methods of teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and oral reading.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:j.e.solity@warwick.ac.uk">j.e.solity@warwick.ac.uk</a>
	Four Blocks	IP	A professional development approach in which teachers in grades 1-3 use nonability-grouped, multi-level instruction.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:fourblocks@carsondellosa.com">fourblocks@carsondellosa.com</a> Website: <a href="http://www.four-blocks.com">www.four-blocks.com</a>
	Ladders to Literacy	IP	A professional development program for kindergarten that focuses on phonics and phonemic awareness, rhyming, and letter sounds. Teachers receive extensive training and follow-up.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:anotari@wri-edu.org">anotari@wri-edu.org</a> Website: <a href="http://www.wri-edu.org/ladders/about.htm">www.wri-edu.org/ladders/about.htm</a>

Best Evidence  
**Encyclopedia (BEE)**

*Empowering Educators with Evidence on Proven Programs*

www.bestevidence.org

Rating	Program	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Open Court Phonics Kit	Curr	Provides teachers with extensive training and materials to teach phonics skills.	Complete contact form at: <a href="http://www.sraonline.com/customerservice_feedback.html">www.sraonline.com/customerservice_feedback.html</a> Website: <a href="http://www.sraonline.com/products.html?tid=7&amp;sid=675">www.sraonline.com/products.html?tid=7&amp;sid=675</a>
	Orton-Gillingham approach	IP	A structured, phonetic reading approach that uses multisensory teaching, emphasizing visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile teaching strategies.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:ortonacademy@verizon.net">ortonacademy@verizon.net</a> Website: <a href="http://www.ortonacademy.org">www.ortonacademy.org</a>
	Phonics-Based Reading	IT	Computer software designed to help beginning readers learn word-attack skills. Children work independently at computer stations through an individualized, structured series of activities that progress from words in isolation to sentences and paragraphs.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:info@lexialearning.com">info@lexialearning.com</a> Website: <a href="http://www.lexialearning.com">www.lexialearning.com</a>

Rating	Program	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Reading and Integrated Literacy Strategies (RAILS)	IP	Provides children in grades K-2 with a second reading period each day to supplement their 60-90 minute reading, and provides teachers with extensive professional development focusing on explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and vocabulary.	E-mail: RJS15@PSU.EDU
	Sing, Spell, Read, and Write	IP	A phonetic approach to beginning reading and writing instruction that uses songs, phonetic storybooks, and systematic, step-by-step development of word attack skills.	E-mail: k12cs@custhelp.com Website: www.pearsonschool.com

 **Insufficient Evidence of Effectiveness**

Destination Reading  
 Headsprout  
 Plato Focus  
 Reading Machine  
 Reading Street  
 The Literacy Center  
 Waterford  
 Writing to Read

**N No Qualifying Studies**

100 Book Challenge  
 ABD's of Reading  
 Academy of Reading

Accelerated Literacy Learning  
Accelerated Reader  
AfterSchool KidzLit  
Alphabetic Phonics  
Barton Reading & Spelling System  
Be a Better Reader  
Breakthrough to Literacy  
Carbo Reading Styles  
Caught Reading  
CCC  
Charlesbridge Reading Fluency  
Classworks  
Compass Reading  
Comprehension Plus  
Comprehension Upgrade  
Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI)  
Conceptually-Based Strategy Instruction  
Consistency Management Cooperative Discipline (CMCD)  
Cross-Aged Literacy Program  
Digitexts  
Disciplinary Literacy  
Discover Intensive Phonics for Yourself  
Dolch Reading Program  
Early Reading Intervention (ERI)  
Early Success  
Earobics  
EasyTech  
Edmark Reading Program  
Electronic Bookshelf  
Elements of Reading: Comprehension  
Elements of Reading: Fluency  
Elements of Reading: Vocabulary  
Essential Learning System  
Failure Free Reading  
Fast ForWord  
Fast Track Reading  
First Steps  
Fluency First  
Fluency Formula  
Fluent Reader

FOCUS Reading and Language Program  
Foundations and Frameworks  
Fountas Pinnell Units of Study (Heineman)  
Foundations  
Funnix Reading Programs  
Glass-Analysis method  
Great Books  
Great Leaps  
Harcourt Collections  
Harcourt Signatures  
Harcourt Trophies  
Houghton Mifflin Nation's Choice  
Houghton Mifflin Reading  
Headsprout Early Reading  
Heinemann, Literacy World  
Heinemann, Rigby Star  
Hodder & Stoughton, Fast Forward  
Hooked on Phonics®  
Horizons  
HOSTS  
Houghton Mifflin Horizons  
Houghton Mifflin Invitations to Literacy  
Houghton Mifflin Legacy of Literacy  
Imagine It!  
IndiVisual Reading  
Intensive Reading Strategies Instruction (IRSI) Model  
Intensive Supplemental Reading  
Invitations to Literacy  
Irlen Method  
Jacob's Ladder  
Jolly Phonics  
Jostens/Compass Learning  
Kaleidoscope  
Kar2ouche  
Kindergarten Works  
Knowledge Box  
K-W-L strategy  
Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling  
Language First!  
Language for Thinking

LANGUAGE!

LeapTrack Assessment & Instruction System  
Learning Experience Approach  
Learning to Read  
Learning Upgrade  
Lexia  
Lightspan  
Like to Read  
Lindamood-Bell  
LiPS  
LitART  
Literacy by Design  
Literacy Seminar  
Little Books  
Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Treasures  
Making Connections  
McGraw-Hill Reading  
McGraw-Hill Spotlight on Literacy  
McGraw-Hill Treasures/Triumphs  
McRAT  
Merit Software  
My Reading Coach  
Open Book Anywhere  
OpenBook to Literacy  
Oxford Reading Tree Stage 1 & 2 First Phonics Talking Stories  
Oxford University Press Reading Tree  
Pathways  
Phonetics First-Focus on Sounds  
Phonics and Friends  
Phonics First Foundations  
Phonics for Reading  
Phono-Graphix  
Project Read  
Putting Reading First in Your Classroom  
Questioning the Author  
Quicktionary Reading Pen II  
Read Naturally  
Read Now  
READ RIGHT  
Read, Write & Type!

ReadAbout  
Reading Apprenticeship  
Reading Horizons  
Reading in the Content Areas  
Reading Plus  
Reading Success  
Reading to Learn  
Reading Triumphs  
Reading Upgrade  
Read Well  
Responsive Classroom  
Rigby Reading  
Rosetta Stone Literacy  
Ruth Miskin Literacy  
S.P.I.R.E. and Sounds Sensible  
Saxon Phonics  
Say Cheese! Early Years and Say Cheese Infants  
Scaffolded Reading Experience  
Schoolwide Enrichment Reading Model (SEM-R)  
Seeing Stars  
SIM-Strategic Instruction Model  
Six Minute Solution  
Slingerland  
Smart Way Reading and Spelling  
Sound Sheets  
Spalding Method  
Spell Read  
SRA Reading  
START-IN  
STEPS (Sequential Teaching of Explicit Phonics and Spelling)  
Strategic Literacy Initiative  
Success in Reading and Writing  
SuccessMaker  
Sunshine  
TeachFirst  
Teaching Reading Essentials  
Tell a Tale 2  
Text Mapping Strategy  
Text Talk  
The Imagination Station

Thinking Works  
Transactional Strategies Instruction  
Tune in to Reading  
Visualizing and Verbalizing  
Vocabulary Improvement Program  
Voices Reading  
Voyager Passport  
Voyager TimeWarp Plus  
Voyager Universal Literacy  
Wilson Reading  
Wright Group Literacy  
WriteToLearn


## Review Methods

An exhaustive search considered more than 2000 published and unpublished articles. It included those that met the following criteria.

- Schools or classrooms using each program had to be compared to randomly assigned or well-matched control groups.
- Study duration had to be at least 12 weeks.
- Outcome measures had to be assessment of the reading content being taught in all classes. Almost all are standardized tests or state assessments.
- The review placed particular emphasis on studies in which schools, teachers, or students were assigned at random to experimental or control groups.

### *Program Ratings Basis*

Programs were rated according to the overall strength of the evidence support in their effects on reading achievement. “Effect size” (ES) is the proportion of a standard deviation by which a treatment exceeds a control group. Average effect sizes were weighted by sample sizes in computing means. The categories are as follows:

-  **Strong Evidence of Effectiveness:** At least two studies, one of which is a large randomized or randomized quasi-experimental study, or multiple smaller studies, with a sample size-weighted effect size of at least +0.20, and a collective sample size across all studies of 500 students or 20 classes.

- 🟡 Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness: At least one randomized or two matched studies of any qualifying design, with a collective sample size of 250 students or 10 classes, and a weighted mean effect size of at least +0.20.
  - 🟡 Limited Evidence of Effectiveness: Strong Evidence of Modest Effects: Studies meet the criteria for ‘moderate evidence of effectiveness’ except that the weighted mean effect size is +0.10 to +0.19.
  - 🟡 Limited Evidence of Effectiveness: Weak Evidence with Notable Effects: Studies have a weighted mean effect size of at least +0.20, but do not qualify for ‘moderate evidence of effectiveness’ due to insufficient numbers of studies or small sample sizes.
  - 🟡 Insufficient Evidence of Effectiveness: Qualifying studies do not meet the criteria for “limited evidence of effectiveness.”
- N No Qualifying studies: No studies meet inclusion standards.

## Full Report

Slavin, R.E., Lake, C., Chambers, B., Cheung, A., & Davis, S. Effective beginning reading programs: A best evidence synthesis. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education.

[http://www.bestevidence.org/reading/begin\\_read/begin\\_read.htm](http://www.bestevidence.org/reading/begin_read/begin_read.htm)