

# COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY GUIDES

*Grades K-6*

Read Alouds | Shared Reading | Small Group Reading Instruction  
| Vocabulary | Fluency | Writing | Phonological Awareness | Phonics |  
Oral Language | **Independent Reading**



For more resources and Professional Learning Opportunities visit: [apl.c.ca](https://apl.c.ca)

To contact our office directly email: [info@apl.c.ca](mailto:info@apl.c.ca)

## OVERVIEW

During independent reading, students choose reading materials (e.g., books, magazines, poetry) and read them on their own with little to no adult support. Students should be reading books that are of interest to them and that they will enjoy. They should be self-selecting texts that they can read with at least 95%+ accuracy and understand and make sense of. This independent reading time is an opportunity for students to 'practice' reading strategies they have learned in whole group, small group, through read alouds and shared reading.

## CURRICULUM CORRELATIONS

### Comprehension Organizing Idea

Text comprehension is supported by applying varied strategies and processes and by considering both particular contexts and universal themes.

- **Kindergarten Learning Outcome:** Children demonstrate understandings of messages communicated in texts.
- **Grade 1 Learning Outcome:** Students investigate meaning communicated in texts.
- **Grade 2 Learning Outcome:** Students examine and apply a variety of processes to comprehend texts.
- **Grade 3 Learning Outcome:** Students analyze text and make connections to personal experiences to support meaning.
- **Grade 4 Learning Outcome:** Students investigate strategies and connections that support text comprehension.
- **Grade 5 Learning Outcome:** Students analyze information, contexts, and perspectives using a variety of comprehension strategies.
- **Grade 6 Learning Outcome:** Students interpret and respond to texts through application of comprehension strategies.



## WHY DO WE READ?

The value of independent reading:

- Become better readers
- Helps us learn
- Able to make sense of diverse, complex texts (newspapers, trade books, ebooks, etc.)
- Become knowledgeable - Explore the world
- Be an informed citizen
- Improves our communication skills
- Increases our vocabulary
- Helps us relax, fall asleep
- Improves our vocabulary
- Is enjoyable
- Creates emotional connections - Develops empathy
- Feel better about ourselves
- Helps us relate to others
- Learn a new skill - helps in the work world
- Good for our brain - promotes thinking, reflection, visualization and analysis
- Is the mark of an educated person
- Appreciate the craft of writing

## RECOMMENDED PRINCIPLES & PRACTICES OF INSTRUCTION

- The most effective programs include daily exposure to a variety of texts and incentives for children to read independently and with others. Short exercises that build reading fluency may include speed drills on component skills, repeated readings of texts, alternate reading with a partner, simultaneous oral reading of easy material, and daily independent reading.
- Vocabulary is best taught with a variety of complementary methods designed to explore the word structure, origin and meaning. Close reading of text for topic specific content is the most important activity for building comprehension.
- Valuable comprehension strategies include

summarizing, clarifying, questioning, using graphic organizers, and visualizing. Strategy instruction should be embedded in reading lessons focused on learning curricular content. Strategies such as formulating questions before, during and after reading can be modeled explicitly by the teacher and practiced overtly during purposeful reading of worthwhile literature.

- Effective teachers encourage frequent prose writing to enable deeper understanding of what is read. (Moats, Laura Cook)

## CONSIDERATIONS - PLANNING TIPS - CLASSROOM DESIGN

- Classroom libraries should have a wide variety of texts to choose from, including different genres and reading levels.
- Organize and label books to match the ways in which students should select them (e.g., by topic).
- Model, teach, and practice procedures during independent reading time (e.g., how to select books, manage personal reading box, track reading, etc.).
- During independent reading time, confer with students 1-on-1 to get a sense of their independent reading and/or offer instructional support. Conferencing also allows for an opportunity to engage in conversation about the text's meaning and the student's thinking.
- Support students in choosing "just right" books.
- Provide magazine boxes/bins or some type of organizational system so that students can easily access their reading materials.
- Create different types of spaces and seating where students can enjoy a "good fit" book.
- Set aside time daily for students to read independently. Gradually increase independent reading time as students build their reading stamina.
- Create "preview stacks" - sets of four or five books at student's reading level that match their interests and reading experiences. Invite students who need support to select books from

this hand-picked stack instead of the entire library.

- Book Boosts - Each day at the end of their independent reading time, a few chosen students can give Book Boosts, one-minute raves about books they've read. Students select a book that they really enjoyed and then give a one-minute talk that generates interest in the book but does not give away the book's ending. These Book Boosts are easy ways to suggest a multitude of titles to students, and they act as a way for students to have something to think about as they read.

Source: [www.readwritethink.org](http://www.readwritethink.org)

## A FEW THOUGHTS FROM EDUCATIONAL EXPERTS

The obvious truth about reading instruction is that students learn to read by reading—the learn to read well by reading with proficiency every day. (Fountas & Pinnell)

Kids not only need to read a lot but they need lots of books they can read right at their fingertips. They also need access to books that entice them, attract them to reading. Schools...can make it easy and unriskey for children to take books home for the evening or weekend by worrying less about losing books to children and more about losing children to illiteracy. (Allington, 2011)

When students read for pleasure, when they get "hooked on books," they acquire, involuntarily and without conscious effort, nearly all of the "language skills" many people are concerned about. (Krashen, 2004)

Self-selected reading is twice as powerful as teacher-selected reading in developing motivations and comprehension. (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004)

You could be the most eloquent teacher, the best strategy group facilitator, the most insightful conferrer, but if you send your kids back for independent reading and they don't read, then they won't make the progress you are hoping for. (Allington, 2011)

If we value readers, we must value all reading. (Miller, 2009)

## DESIGNERS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TIPS

- Allow time for talk. Providing opportunities for students to talk about what they are reading can help motivate peers to read, incites more thinking about what they are reading, and helps them to feel connected as a community of readers.
- Student choice is essential!
- Develop intrinsic motivation to read. Be thoughtful about the use of motivation tools such as class tally charts, reading awards, prizes and online comprehension tests. Aim for a balance.
- Build a Community of Readers and a classroom environment where reading is socially acceptable and highly valued. Talk to students as “readers” – this is what good readers do – let them share what they are reading, what they did to tackle difficult sections, be the first to read a new book in the classroom library (Dr. Steven Layne shares the idea of placing a book label in the front cover where students can sign their name as the first reader – being the first to read a book can become prestigious!), create book promotion posters, etc.
- Remind students why we read and how it can make us smarter.
- Get students in the habit of reading at home as well as the reading that happens at school. Consider pros and cons of a formal tracking chart vs. an honour system – e.g., committing to 20 minutes/day whenever possible.
- Capitalize on this learning time and circulate around to provide support or just listen in as a student reads. This can provide you with a wealth of information about the reader and their reading behaviours. You may choose to do a running record as you listen (see Planning and Assessment Tools).



- Be a champion reader. Keep a reader’s notebook. Talk about the book you could not put down, the one you cannot wait to start, and upcoming book releases. Read aloud to the class.
- Think aloud and model what you do to ‘break the code’ and make sense of text. Read extensive amounts of children’s literature beyond your own interests so you can make quality recommendations to all your students.

## STUDENT RESPONSE- REFLECTING ON READING

From time to time, students should be asked to respond and reflect on their independent reading.

They could revisit their reading goals and reflect on their progress. They could be asked to respond in a variety of ways, eg., craft a personal response, analyze the story, synthesize the information learned, add an entry in their reader’s notebook, complete a graphic organizer, or design a book project. Designate a “Talk” day so students can talk to each other about the book they are reading. Asking all students a generic question will allow everyone to say something about whatever they are reading (What do you like about what you are reading?). Reflection tasks serve a valuable purpose, but should not be implemented so frequently that they decrease student motivation to read.

## SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE...

- **Time** – Students should have time each day to read independently.
- **Books** – A classroom library should have a variety of books of varying levels, interests and genres.
- **Choice** – Students should have the opportunity to choose the books they read during independent reading time. It is important that they be taught how to choose good fit books.
- **Book Box/Bin** – This can help students keep their reading materials in one spot and easily locate them during independent reading time.
- **Book Talks/Recommendations** – Promote books at every opportunity, both ones you are reading and ones students have enjoyed. Invite students to keep a list of what they want to read next.



- **High Expectations** – students know if reading is valued in the classroom. Do you expect them to read 5 books or 40 books a year? Are students held accountable – setting goals and tracking their progress?
- **Strong Model** – Teacher reads, stays current with latest favourites and is continually in search of engaging and motivating children’s literature.

## CHALLENGES

- **Students not enjoying reading** – Reinforce how to choose good fit books and promote giving books a ‘ten-page’ chance to allow sufficient time to get into the story. Place a stack of titles on their desk that you have personally selected for them. Give students permission to abandon books they do not like, because that is what good readers do.
- **Students spending all the allotted independent reading time choosing books** – Provide opportunities for students to change their reading materials on a regular basis outside of the time dedicated for independent reading. By maintaining a book bin with four to five self-selected books in it that are refreshed as needed, students will be better able to settle in and read and they will not distract others shuffling around the shelves.
- **Students are fake reading** – Do a reading inventory in order to find out what students interests are so you can help them find engaging and motivating books. Guide students to select books closer to their reading level. Offer book talks to promote high interest books. Allow students to read a variety of texts: picture books, graphic novels, informational texts, and how-to guides.
- **Students not understanding or applying strategies** – Confer and have a conversation about what the student is reading and the strategies they are using or not using. Discuss points of confusion and where they got off track. Help the student to visualize while they read. Slow down their reading rate and invite more moments of reflection and self-monitoring. Alternatively, some students need to work on fluency, increase their reading rate, and extend their eye gaze to take in more of

the sentence so they can anticipate what is ahead, where the punctuation and natural breaks are and start to tackle text in chunks (not just proceed word by word). If they spend most of their energy decoding words, they will not be able to proceed to making sense of text and applying reading strategies. These students need a less challenging text.

- **Reading is over structured** – there is a risk that we manage so much of the reading process that it stilt the experience. Students need to enjoy reading without feeling overwhelmed by the amount of tracking and follow up activities. Aim for a balance between letting them steer and coaching them along the way.
- **Too much for the teacher to do** – Identify a limited number of students to confer with. Create strong routines so students self-manage during conferring/independent reading time. Build stamina slowly over the first few weeks and months of school so there are no interruptions, students are able to sustain interest in their reading and know what to do if they get stuck. Use personalized book bins. Do not attempt to be everywhere getting students on task and reminding them of their reading goals. Consider creating a visual reminder of their reading goals, e.g. on a post-it on their desk, on a binder ring, or a bookmark. (Serravallo)



## PLANNING & ASSESSMENT

### Book Lists:

[Young Reader's Choice Awards – Gr 4-12.](#)  
[Junior Division features books nominated for Grades 4-6.](#)

[Association for Library Service to Children – Notable Lists and Award Winners](#)

[Goodreads – Elementary Book Lists \(favourites created by site members\)](#)

[Student Interests – Reading Inventories](#)

### Tools to help determine independent reading levels:

Accuracy levels for independent reading should be 95% or higher. Also important to factor in student interest, background knowledge and comprehension. Students can read more challenging books if they are motivated to and have the background knowledge to make a text more accessible.

How to Take A Running Record:

<https://www.readinga-z.com/helpful-tools/about-running-records/>

Johns, J. L. (2017). Basic reading inventory: Pre-primer through grade twelve & early literacy assessments(12th ed.). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Pub.

Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System

## ASSESSMENT OF INDEPENDENT READING

### Look for:

- maintain stamina for independent reading for at least 10 minutes daily.
- manage their own distractions.
- set reading goals for engagement and volume.
- actively read and comprehend a book of their choice.
- respond to their reading in writing to show their thinking as they read.
- cite evidence from their text to back up claims about plot, character, author's purpose, text structure, and more.

### Formative assessment of independent reading:

- reflections on how independent reading is going, including how students are managing distractions and monitoring their comprehension as they read.
- reader's response journals where students write about what they are reading. We can help them move beyond summary to sharing all the ways they are actively reading to engage with the text. Providing prompts can be helpful for getting students to put their thinking on paper.
- exit tickets with a specific prompt related to a learning goal.
- conference notes.
- observation notes. ([Assessing Independent Reading Without Killing our Students' Love of Books – Mackin Learning](#))

## SEE IT IN ACTION



- [Independent Reading in Class: Benefits and Strategies](#) – Dana Cole, Sept. 8, 2022
- [Setting up Your Independent Reading Routines](#) – Booksource, July 17, 2017
- [Classroom Library Organization and Book Buddy](#) – Triple Fit Teach, Sept. 24, 2015
- [Organize Your Classroom Library for Young Readers](#) – Pioneer Valley Books, Aug. 10, 2018
- [Compliment Conferences](#) – Jennifer Serravallo, Oct. 30, 2014
- [Research-Decide-Teach Conference](#) – Jennifer Serravallo, Oct. 30, 2014
- [Coaching Conference](#) – Jennifer Serravallo, Oct. 30, 2014

## RESOURCES

Boushey, G., & Moser, J. (2014). The daily 5 (2 ed.) fostering literacy independence in the elementary grades. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

### [How I Use Book Boxes or Book Bags in K-2](#)

Layne, S. (2009). Igniting a passion for reading. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Miller, D., & Anderson, J. (2009). The book whisperer: Awakening the inner reader in every child. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, D. & Moss, B. (2013). No more independent reading without support. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Serravallo, J. (2019). A teacher's guide to reading conferences, grades K-8. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

### [Using Student Book Bins in the Elementary Classroom](#)

