Michigan's Multi-Tiered System of Supports Technical Assistance Center
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K-12 Literacy Dyslexia Research Network: Session 3 Learning Guide

This learning guide supports participant learning and application by synthesizing key ideas, highlighting relevant resources, and identifying opportunities for further exploration and application. Participants can use this guide to preview or revisit session content, deepen their understanding, and consider how to apply the learning to their professional practice.

Session Title: Structured Literacy: Foundational Skills/Word Recognition

Date: November 17, 2026

Key Takeaways

- "Structured literacy" is an umbrella term describing an approach to intervention that includes common features and content areas (i.e., it does not refer to one program).
- Structured literacy includes phonemic awareness, phonics, orthography, morphology, syntax, semantics, and comprehension-supportive practices.
- Core features of structured literacy include explicit teaching, systematic instruction, targeted feedback, planned practice opportunities, and data-based decision making.
- Explicit and systematic instruction is aligned with the evidence base for reading instruction.
- Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when combined with letters. Phonemic awareness instruction that combines practice in blending and segmenting is most important for beginning readers. No evidence suggests that advanced training in phonemic awareness skills for students who are reading improves their reading outcomes.
- Reading nonsense words is important for assessing students' word reading skills; however, no studies suggest that extensive practice reading nonsense words is beneficial.
- Decodable texts may support beginning word reading, but students should also practice reading authentic texts. Instruction should occur with words in isolation and within connected text.
- Students begin learning multisyllabic words as early as first grade after learning basic phonics skills and "sight words."
- Morphological awareness helps students expand vocabulary and word reading skills. Teaching students morphemes (units of meaning within words) supports decoding and spelling. Morphemes include roots or bases, prefixes, and suffixes.

Session Resources

- Book - Structured Literacy Interventions: Teaching Students with Reading Difficulties, Grades K-6 (Spear-Swerling, 2022)
- Video - Structured Literacy Intervention: Chapter 1 Book Study with Dr. Louise Spear-Swerling (2022).
- Article - Structured Literacy and Typical Literacy Practices (Spear-Swerling, 2018)
- Article - Examining the Effects of Orton-Gillingham Reading Interventions for Students with or at Risk for Word-Level Reading Disabilities
- Article - What Does Science Say About Orton-Gillingham Interventions? (Solari, Petscher, & Hall, 2021)
- Article - Orton-Gillingham: Which Aspects are Supported by Research and Which Require Additional Research? (Austin, Stevens, Demchack, & Solari, 2023)

Additional Resources

- MDE Dyslexia Handbook: A Guide to Accelerating Learner Outcomes in Literacy
- K-12 Literacy Dyslexia Research Network: Cohort 2 FAQ

Recommended Next Steps

- Support teachers in implementing explicit and systematic literacy instruction.
- Provide coaching on explicit and systematic foundational skills instruction.
- Encourage teachers not to teach cueing systems and guessing strategies.
- Encourage teachers to teach phonemic awareness with print; use real words for decoding practice; and give students opportunities to read decodable, authentic, and stretch text.
- Encourage teachers to differentiate instruction there is no “one size fits all” approach that will work for all students.
- Use student data to guide instructional decision making and intervention planning.
- Dig deeper into one or more of the resources provided for this session
- Discuss how today’s content connects to literacy priorities and practices in your context.
- Identify one idea, resource, or strategy you could apply in your practice.
- Develop a plan for sharing key takeaways or resources with colleagues, staff, or other stakeholders. Outline talking points to increase staff of colleague understanding.

References

Austin, C., Stevens, L., Demchack, A., & Solari, E. (2023). Orton-Gillingham: Which aspects are supported by research, and which require additional research? *The Reading League Journal, 4*(3), 5-15.

Solari et al. (2021). What does science say about Orton-Gillingham interventions? An explanation and commentary on the Stevens et al. (2021) meta-analysis. *The Reading League Journal, 2*(2), 46-51.

Spear-Swerling, L. (2019). Structured literacy and typical practices: Understanding differences to create instructional opportunities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 51*(3), 201-211.

Spear-Swerling, L. (2022). *Structured literacy interventions: Teaching students with reading difficulties, grades K-6.* Guilford Press.

Stevens, E. et al. (2021). Current state of the evidence: Examining the effects of Orton-Gillingham reading interventions for students with risk or at risk for word-level reading disabilities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 87*(4), 397-417.

Vaughn, S., Stevens, E.A., St. Martin, K., & Rizzuto-Hellebuyck, K. (2026). *A coaching guide to support teachers of students with dyslexia characteristics.* MiMTSS Technical Assistance Center, Michigan Department of Education.

URLs Used in Document

Structured Literacy Interventions: Teaching Students with Reading Difficulties, Grades K-6

(https://bit.ly/4iJUTS8)

Structured Literacy Intervention: Chapter 1 Book Study with Dr. Louise Spear-Swerling

(https://bit.ly/4kDQWAL)

Structured Literacy and Typical Literacy Practices

(https://bit.ly/4sTprWe)

Examining the Effects of Orton-Gillingham Reading Interventions for Students With or at Risk for Word-Level Reading Disabilities

(https://bit.ly/4zKQSUD)

What Does Science Say About Orton-Gillingham Interventions?

(https://bit.ly/4sRfQPE)

Orton-Gillingham: Which Aspects are Supported by Research and Which Require Additional Research?

(https://bit.ly/4BMDL6Z)

Cohort 2 FAQ

(https://tinyurl.com/LDRNC2FAQ)

MDE Dyslexia Handbook: A Guide to Accelerating Learner Outcomes in Literacy

(https://tinyurl.com/MDEHandbook)

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