

# HOW TO PREVENT READING DIFFICULTIES

Book Study

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## Book Study

**Welcome to the book study for Mark Weakland's *How to Prevent Reading Difficulties*.** We know professional development is important to teachers, but we also recognize that there are a lot of demands on your time. We have deliberately designed this book study to be collaborative so that most weeks the group is splitting the reading and recommended in-class activities among the members of the book study. Each book study participant comes to group ready to share the reading and in-class strategies she was assigned. That way everyone gets the benefit of all of the learning, strategies, and practices shared in *How to Prevent Reading Difficulties* without having to personally read every page and practice every strategy.

### By the end of the book study, as a group you will have learned:

- How the reading process arises in the brain
- What reading difficulties look like in the classroom and best practices to address them
- How the Eternal Triangle and the Simple View of Reading can help you conceptualize and organize classroom reading practices
- Why it's important to practice the five most effective teaching techniques (and what they are) every day
- What are some of the best activities to build language comprehension, phonological skills, and orthographic skills
- Why guided-reading, and/or small-group work, are essential for all PreK–3 students with suggested schedules for how best to incorporate this vital instruction into your classroom
- How to ensure that your students are getting 20–25 minutes of high-quality, supported independent reading every day

At the end of the book study, each participant will have either practiced, or learned about from a colleague, **more than 40 effective reading practices**. We have even provided an **Effective Reading Practices Chart** so that each book study member can map reading practices (those she personally tests in her classroom as well as those her colleagues introduce in their classrooms) to the reading component(s) they help teach.

Thank you for selecting *How to Prevent Reading Difficulties* for your book study. And thank you for the hard (and joyful) work you do every day to teach our children how to read.

# INTRODUCTION

**Synopsis:** Decades of research indicate that particular types of instruction are especially effective for teaching children to read, write, and spell. But although we know scientifically what instruction works best, little has been written about how as a profession we take this knowledge and turn it into classroom best practices. Reading is a complex, multifaceted activity with many pieces influencing each other in myriad ways.

Successful literacy instruction includes teacher-used instructional practices, activities and strategies that build language comprehension, activities and strategies that build word recognition, and extended and extensive reading. If we integrate best practices from all four of these categories, teachers can instruct specifically to students' identified areas of concern and actually prevent reading difficulties from developing.



## DURING READING

1. **NOTE** a practice that falls into one of the following four categories that you used in your classroom recently, when you used it and why, and how effective that strategy was. Be prepared to discuss with the group.

- Teacher-used instructional techniques
- Activities and strategies that build language comprehension
- Activities and strategies that build word recognition
- Extended and extensive reading

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2. **REFLECT** on this sentence—*When best practices are used, many students with [reading] problems in their early years do not have long-term [reading] difficulties* (page 8). Take time to celebrate your ability to prevent long-term reading difficulties for your struggling readers.

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3. **IDENTIFY** three things you would like to learn while reading this book.

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2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_



## AS A GROUP

1. From the learning goals you each established individually, **SELECT** five over arching goals you plan to focus on as a group.

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2. **TAKE** turns discussing the instructional practice you used in your classroom recently and ways in which you might alter this practice to make it even more effective. Write down your ideas so that you can revisit them when a particular practice is explored later in the book.

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### Looking Ahead to Chapter 1

If not everyone in the group thinks they will have time to read all of Chapter 1, ask for a volunteer(s) to read pages 9–14 and report back on what they found most interesting and what surprised them while reading.



# CHAPTER 1—THE READING BRAIN

**Synopsis:** The brain is constantly changing and adapting. This plasticity enables teachers through their instructional practices to help students connect the parts of the brain that lead to reading.

Most of the reading network is created in the neocortex, which is made up of two hemispheres: the left (details, focus, control) and the right (empathy, inference, big-picture thinking). The hemispheres also encompass four lobes and the limbic brain, which stores long-term memory and connects sensory input to memory.

The Eternal Triangle, made up of Semantics (meaning), Phonology (sound), and Orthography (spelling), describes the brain areas and pathways that we use to read. The Language Pathway, which links Phonology (sound) and Semantics (meaning) allows us to understand spoken word through hearing, observation, and cognition.

The Lexical Pathway links Orthography (spelling) and Semantics (meaning) and is based on our learned ability to associate letters and sounds, known as the alphabetic principle, key to learning how to read. As we learn to read, we store entire words, including their sound, spelling, and meaning in our brain dictionary. We automatically use this dictionary when we read.

Mature readers use the Lexical pathway, also known as the Whole-Word pathway, most of the time when reading, which relies heavily on word recognition, the ability to instantly match a spelling sequence to pronunciation. The Sublexical Pathway, or sounding-it out-pathway, allows us to decode letters, sounds, and “chunks” and for young readers start to connect letters and sounds to pronunciations and store that information in their brain dictionary. Even mature readers use the Sublexical pathway, when they encounter unfamiliar words.



## DURING READING



*If you don't have time to read the entire chapter, concentrate on pages 14–21 and Figure 1.5 on page 23.*

1. **THINK** about each struggling reader in your class. What areas or pathways might be at the root of their reading difficulties?

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2. **For lower grades:** Identify what you are currently doing in your classroom to build the alphabetic principle. Be prepared to discuss with the group a practice or practices you think are particularly effective.

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## AS A GROUP

1. If everyone did not have a chance to read the section on the reading brain, ask those who did read it to **SHARE** what they found most interesting and what surprised them.

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2. **For PreK–1:** Take turns discussing what you are currently doing in your classroom to build the alphabetic principle and why you think a particular practice or group of practices works so well. As a group, discuss ways in which you might improve upon each practice. Write down your ideas so that you can revisit them when a particular practice is explored later in the book.

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2. **For Grades 2–3:** Take turns discussing what you are currently doing in your classroom to build word recognition and why you think a particular practice or group of practices works so well. As a group, discuss ways in which you might improve upon each practice. Write down your ideas so that you can revisit them when a particular practice is explored later in the book.

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### Looking Ahead to Chapter 2

Most likely not everyone in the group will have time to read all of Chapter 2, so ask for a volunteer or volunteers to read pages 25–32 and report back on the two cases studies and how they help distinguish between a reading disability that arises mostly from biology and a reading difficulty due to instructional and/or societal factors.









2. **DISCUSS** the complexity behind the Simple View of Reading, using Figures 2.2 and 2.3. Determine how you might use these figures going forward to help you map best instructional practices (presented in later chapters) to the components of reading.

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3. **COMPARE** your classroom reading graphs and identify the quadrants where most of your students across all classes fall. Use this to guide the group on practices to concentrate on as you explore Chapters 4–7.

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**Looking Ahead to Chapter 3**

Chapter 3 is so critical that we recommend dividing the reading into two sessions, reading pages 43–54 for one group discussion and reading pages 55–68 for a second group discussion. However, you can discuss the entire chapter in a single session if that fits your schedule better.



# CHAPTER 3—HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHING TECHNIQUES

**Synopsis:** Research has shown that some teaching techniques are more effective than others. They better hold the attention of students, increase opportunities to progress and process, and lead to greater rates of learning and retention. The author identifies five techniques, proven to be highly effective in teaching reading, that he recommends using every day—Repetition and Distributed Practice, Teach Directly and Explicitly, Instantly Correct Errors, Give Wait Time, and Activate the Senses with a Multisensory Component—defines each technique, and discusses when and how to use it.



## DURING READING PAGES 43–54



*We recommend dividing the reading into two sessions, reading pages 43–54 for one group discussion and reading pages 55–68 for a second group discussion.*

- 1. THINK** about when and how you use Repetition and Distributed Practice, what component(s) of reading you are teaching, and which specific instructional routines you use. Note a specific example to discuss with the group.

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- 2. CONTEMPLATE** when you find it best to Teach Directly and Explicitly and why. Be prepared to discuss with the group.

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- 3. REFLECT** upon how you Instantly Correct Errors in such a way that you promote accurate learning without being overly corrective. Note a specific example to discuss with the group.

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## AS A GROUP PAGES 43–54

1. **DISCUSS** specific examples of how and when you use Repetition and Distributed Practice and the specific routines that have worked most effectively in your classrooms.

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2. **DISCUSS** when you Teach Directly and Explicitly and discuss why you feel that is the most effective technique to use at the time, as well as if you have ever used this practice at a time where it wasn't effective and why.

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3. The author provides the Dot and Check Spelling routine as an example of a way to Instantly Correct Errors. **DISCUSS** specific examples of other routines you regularly use in your classroom to Instantly Correct Errors, why you use each routine, and if you think particular routines are more effective for specific learning goals.

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## AS A GROUP PAGES 55–68

1. **SHARE** the examples of how you use Wait Time in your classrooms and why you think this practice is so important.

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2. **PROVIDE** one or two examples from the last week in your classroom of when you used Multisensory Teaching and discuss why you used this technique in those particular scenarios.

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3. **BRING** the letter-sound chart that you use in your classroom and look at each chart to determine if it meets the criteria the author provides on page 65. Decide upon a letter-sound chart that all PreK–3 teachers will use.

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### Looking Ahead to Chapter 4

Divide the group into teams (1) Practices to Build and Strengthen Language Comprehension, (2) Vocabulary Instruction that Builds Background Knowledge, and (3) Bringing It All Together: The Interactive Read Aloud. Each team selects the technique(s) they want to practice. Team 1 may want to have each member select one practice from the four included. Ideally the group would cover all six of the classroom practices outlined in Chapter 4.



# CHAPTER 4—BUILDING LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

**Synopsis:** Language comprehension is fundamental to reading comprehension. The six classroom practices explored in this chapter build and strengthen background knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, topical knowledge, and metacognition strategies, all components of language comprehension. Research indicates that it's important to build language knowledge of all types, especially background knowledge. Since background knowledge is essential for text comprehension, many of the practices outlined in the chapter build background and topical knowledge.



*Everyone reads pages 69–71 and 102–103, and each team member reads about her selected practice(s). If your book study lasts four or more months, you can divide the chapter into two sessions.*



## DURING READING

1. **THINK** about the students in your class for whom a lack of background knowledge may be preventing language comprehension. What practices have you used to help them acquire background knowledge and what has been most effective? Add the techniques that have worked to your Effective Reading Practices Chart.

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2. While reading about the practice(s) assigned to you, determine which reading component(s) each technique addresses, note which students may need extra help or time, plan when and how you will introduce the instruction, determine how you will differentiate your instruction to meet your students' needs, and decide how you will measure success. **CREATE** your lesson plan!

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## AS A GROUP

1. Each team presents the technique(s) they practiced, when and why they used the technique, challenges they encountered, and the successes they saw. You may not have time to present all of the practices, so decide in advance which practices are most important to **DISCUSS** as a group.

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2. **BRAINSTORM** ways to overcome challenges and discuss how you might improve or modify the practice over the next few weeks to better meet your students' needs.

**Note:** Ideally, every participant will walk away with lesson plans and materials for all six practices that they can use as is or modify by grade level for their students.

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### Looking Ahead to Chapter 5

Divide the group into two teams (1) Activities That Teach Large Chunks of Sound: Phonological Awareness and (2) Activities That Teach the Smallest Chunks of Sound: Phonemic Awareness. Or create multiple teams with each team selecting a practice from both groups of activities. Each team selects the technique(s) they want to practice, assigning one practice per team member. Ideally the team would cover all nine of the classroom practices outlined in Chapter 5.




# CHAPTER 5—BUILDING PHONOLOGICAL SKILLS

**Synopsis:** The terms phonological and phonemic refer to sound only, but phonological and phonemic activities are not synonymous. Phonological awareness is the more encompassing term and refers to the general awareness of the sound structures of speech. Phonemics refers to phonemes, the small sound units of words. There are 44 phonemes in English. Phonics refers to print. In terms of the Simple View of Reading, phonic reading develops from a synthesis of phonemic awareness, letter identification, letter-sound associations, pattern and word recognition, and decoding.

Advanced phonological awareness acts as an anchor for orthographic mapping, the mental process our brain uses to learn and store the correct letter sequences of words. Stored words become available for immediate and effortless retrieval during reading. Since lack of word recognition ability is the number one skill deficit for most children experiencing reading difficulties, creating a solid foundation of phonology is essential because it helps head off reading difficulties.

In this chapter, the author shares nine practices that move PreK–3 students toward advanced phonological and phonemic awareness.

 *Everyone reads pages 105–109 and 130–132, and each team member reads about her selected practice(s). If your book study lasts four or more months, you can divide the chapter into two sessions.*



## DURING READING

1. **THINK** about the students in your class who are experiencing reading difficulties due to lack of word-level reading. What practices have you used to help them acquire greater word recognition ability and what has been most effective? Add the techniques that have worked to your Effective Reading Practices Chart.

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2. While reading about the practice(s) assigned to you, determine which reading component(s) the technique addresses, note which students may need extra help or time, plan when and how you will introduce the instruction, determine how you will differentiate your instruction to meet your students' needs, and decide how you will measure success.  
**CREATE** your lesson plan!

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## AS A GROUP

1. Each team presents the technique(s) they practiced, when and why they used each technique, challenges they encountered, and the success they saw. You may not have time to present all of the practices, so decide in advance which practices are most important to **DISCUSS** as a group.

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2. **BRAINSTORM** ways to overcome challenges and discuss how you might improve or modify the practice over the next few weeks to better meet your students' needs.

**Note:** Ideally, every participant will walk away with lesson plans and materials for all nine practices that they can use as is or modify by grade level for their students.

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### Looking Ahead to Chapter 6


Divide the group into multiple teams with each team selecting activities from the practices covered between the sections Building Letter-Sound Associations and Noticing and Using Patterns for Reading, Spelling, and Vocabulary Meaning. Each team selects the activities it wants to practice, assigning one per team member. Ideally the team would cover all fifteen of the classroom practices outlined in Chapter 6.





# CHAPTER 6—BUILDING ORTHOGRAPHIC SKILLS

**Synopsis:** Orthography, a language’s conventional spelling system, can be thought of as the recordings of the correct letter sequences. Our brain stores these sequences as chunks and whole words, which are used for both spelling and reading. Mark Weakland uses orthography to discuss both phonics (decoding) and spelling (encoding) because he believes that they are best understood when presented together. According to the author, the guideposts to teaching reading in the primary classroom are: (1) teaching phonological awareness to an advanced level, (2) directly, explicitly, and systematically teaching phonic and spelling patterns to a point of mastery, and (3) providing many opportunities for students to read extended text for extended periods of time. The fifteen practices outlined in this chapter address these three guideposts.

 *Everyone reads pages 133–137, 146–147, and 169–170, and each team member reads about her selected practice(s). If your book study lasts four or more months, you can divide the chapter into two or three sessions.*



## DURING READING

1. **THINK** about how you are already building pattern study into your literacy instruction. What practices have you used to help your students understand how words work at the pattern level? Add the techniques that have worked to your Effective Reading Practices Chart.

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2. While reading about the practice(s) assigned to you, determine which reading component(s) the technique addresses, note which students may need extra help or time. Plan when and how you will introduce the instruction, determine how you will differentiate your instruction to meet your students’ needs, and decide how you will measure success. **CREATE** your lesson plan!

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## AS A GROUP

1. Each team **PRESENTS** the technique(s) they practiced, when and why they used the technique, challenges they encountered, and the successes they saw. You may not have time to present all of the practices, so decide in advance which practices are most important to discuss as a group.

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2. **BRAINSTORM** ways to overcome challenges and discuss how you might improve or modify the practice over the next few weeks to better meet your students' needs.

**Note:** Ideally, every participant will walk away with lesson plans and materials for all fifteen practices that they can use as is or modify by grade level for their students.

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### Looking Ahead to Chapter 7

We recommend covering Chapter 7 in at least two sessions. Since you are most likely already incorporating Guided Reading and Reading to Develop Fluency, let participants select which section they would like to read and practice before your next group meeting.




# CHAPTER 7—GUIDED, REPEATED, INDEPENDENT

**Synopsis:** For students to become competent readers, they must be taught essential skills and strategies by trained professionals and be given adequate time to practice. And they must spend as much time in extended reading—which includes, guided groups, independent time, content-area reading, book club—as possible every day, in fact more time reading than in reading instruction.

While it may be difficult to find the time for extended reading, even small increases in reading extended text can boost reading achievement. Guided small-group reading is an effective extended-reading practice for preventing and lessening reading difficulties and should be done in every grade PreK–3. Reading poems, during shared, guided, and independent reading, is another highly effective and engaging way to increase extended reading time. Poems allow students to practice a variety of literacy elements, including fluency, phonic patterns, vocabulary, comprehension, speaking and listening, and more. Supported independent reading allows students to deeply engage with reading a wide variety of high-interest books and builds stamina, motivation, and flow.

Reading fluency—the ability to read accurately at a reasonable pace and with expression and phrasing—is essential to reading comprehension. Repeated reading is a particularly effective and efficient practice to build more accurate word reading, improve oral-reading fluency, and increase reading comprehension.

 *Everyone reads pages 171–174 and then either reads the section on Small-Group Guided Reading, pages 175–183 or Reading to Develop Fluency (Repeated Reading), pages 184–189.*



## DURING READING, PAGES 171–189

1. How many minutes are you currently spending on extended reading time every day? Do you spend more time on extended reading than reading instruction? **THINK** about how you might increase extended reading by just seven minutes each day.

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2. **For those reading about Small-Group Guided Reading (pages 175–183)**

Think about how you currently practice Guided Reading and consider if any of the alternate approaches outlined on pages 178–179 might supplement what you are already doing in your classroom. Develop a plan for how you will incorporate this new technique into your Guided Reading instruction.

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3. **For those reading about Reading to Develop Fluency (pages 184–189)**

Think about how you typically introduce Choral or Echo Reading and consider which of the suggestions outlined under How To (page 187) might best supplement what you are already doing. Develop a plan for how you will incorporate this new technique into your reading instruction.

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## AS A GROUP

1. The Guided Reading group **REPORTS** what they learned in the reading, discusses how they currently practice Guided Reading, when and why they use this strategy, challenges they have encountered, and success they have experienced.

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2. The Repeated Reading (Reading to Develop Fluency) group **REPORTS** what they learned in the reading, discusses how they currently practice Repeated Reading, when and why they use this strategy, challenges they have encountered, and success they have experienced.

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3. **BRAINSTORM** ways to overcome challenges and discuss how you might improve or modify Guided Reading and Repeated Reading practices over the next few weeks to better meet your students' needs.

Determine as a group how much Guided Reading you would like to commit to practicing every day.

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### Looking Ahead to Chapter 7 (pages 190–217)

During your next meeting, the group will cover the second half of Chapter 7. Since you are most likely already incorporating Reading Poems and Supported Independent Reading, let participants select which section they would like to read and practice before your next group meeting. For those in the Supported Independent Reading group, ask them to select one of the following techniques—Selling a Book (page 204), Book Bins by Theme (pages 205–208), The “No Drama” Way to Pick the Right Book (page 208), EZ Six-Bin Leveling (pages 209–210), Personal Book Bags/Envelops (pages 211–212), or The *I Can List* (pages 213–216)









## AS A GROUP

1. The Reading Poems group reports what they learned in the reading, discusses how they currently use poems in the classroom, challenges they have encountered, and success they have experienced. One person from the group describes how to level a poem. **SHARE** the poems you leveled with your colleagues.

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2. The Supported Independent Reading group **REPORTS** what they learned in the reading, discusses the activities they were assigned, challenges they encountered, and success they experienced.

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3. **BRAINSTORM** ways to overcome challenges and discuss how you might improve or modify Reading Poems and Supported Independent Reading practices over the next few weeks to better meet your students' needs.

**DETERMINE** as a group how much Supported Independent Reading you would like to commit to practicing every day.

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## INTO THE CLASSROOM

Over the next few weeks, work toward increasing your daily Supported Independent Reading time to the amount of time you committed to as a group.

**NOTE** the differences the increase in time makes in your students' reading progress.

**IDENTIFY** particularly effective techniques you use during Supported Reading time and use your Effective Reading Practices Chart to help you group each technique under the reading component(s) it most effectively teaches. Your toolbox of techniques to use at different stages is now complete. Congratulations!

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## A FINAL WORD

A month or so after you have completed your book study, read the section *What's Next?*, paying particular attention to the bulleted points on pages 221–222. Continue to practice these five things every day in your classroom, and you will help prevent reading difficulties.

# EFFECTIVE READING PRACTICES CHART

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION			
	What I Did	What Worked	What I Would Change
<b>Attention</b>			
Comprehension monitoring			
<b>Language Skills</b>			
Inferencing			
Vocabulary knowledge			
Grammatical and syntactical knowledge			

# LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

	What I Did	What Worked	What I Would Change
<b>Language Skills</b>			
General knowledge			
Topical knowledge			
Genre and text structure knowledge			

# WORD RECOGNITION

	What I Did	What Worked	What I Would Change
<b>Phonic Decoding</b>			
Phonological skills			
Letter ID knowledge			
Letter-sound knowledge			
Rapid naming			

# WORD RECOGNITION

	What I Did	What Worked	What I Would Change
<b>Word-Specific Knowledge</b>			
Orthographic knowledge			
Phonological long-term memory			
Sight recognition of specific words			