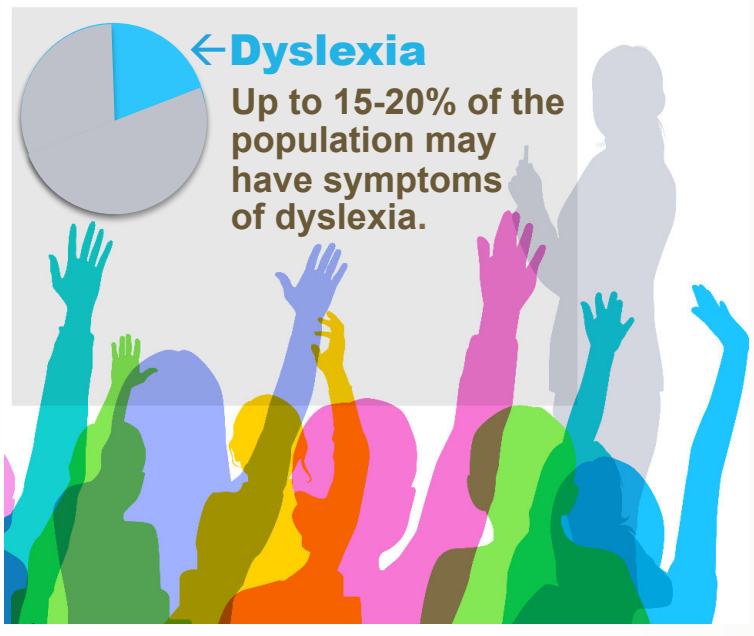
What Is Structured Literacy?

A Primer on Effective Reading Instruction

STRUCTURED LITERACY PRIMER

Why Structured Literacy?

Children with dyslexia are in nearly every classroom—but effective reading instruction is NOT.



Learning to read can be a significant challenge for students with dyslexia. Fortunately, this challenge usually CAN be overcome with effective reading instruction. Unfortunately, if not overcome, lifelong consequences can be harsh.

Popular reading approaches (e.g., Guided Reading or Balanced Literacy) are not effective for students with dyslexia because these approaches do not focus on the decoding skills struggling readers need to succeed.

Structured Literacy explicitly teaches systematic word-identification/decoding strategies. These benefit most students and are *vital* for those with dyslexia.

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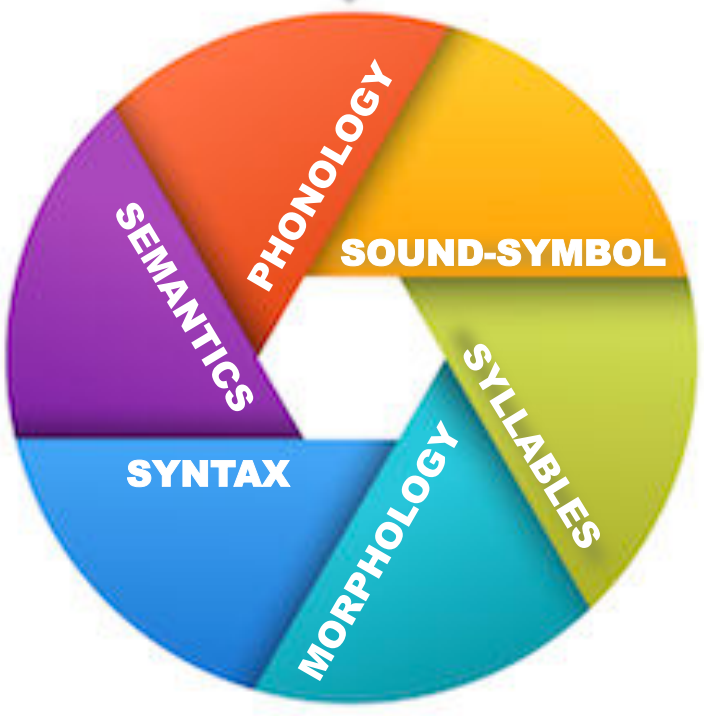
Structured Literacy's ELEMENTS work together.



Structured Literacy's
Evidence–Based Elements

Phonology (study of sound structure of spoken words) is a key element of Structured Literacy Instruction. **Phonemic awareness** (ability to distinguish / segment / blend / manipulate sounds relevant to reading/spelling) is central to phonology.

Sound-Symbol Association Once students develop phoneme awareness, they must learn the **alphabetic principle**—how to map phonemes to letters (**graphemes**) and vice versa.

Syllables Knowing the six syllable / vowel grapheme types helps readers associate vowel spellings with vowel sounds. Syllable division rules help readers divide / decode unfamiliar words.

Morphology A **morpheme** is the smallest unit of meaning in language. Studying base elements and affixes helps readers decode and unlock the meanings of complex words.

Syntax—the set of principles that dictate the sequence and function of words in a sentence—includes grammar, sentence structure, and the mechanics of language.

Semantics Semantics is concerned with meaning. The Structured Literacy curriculum (from the start) includes instruction in the comprehension and appreciation of written language.

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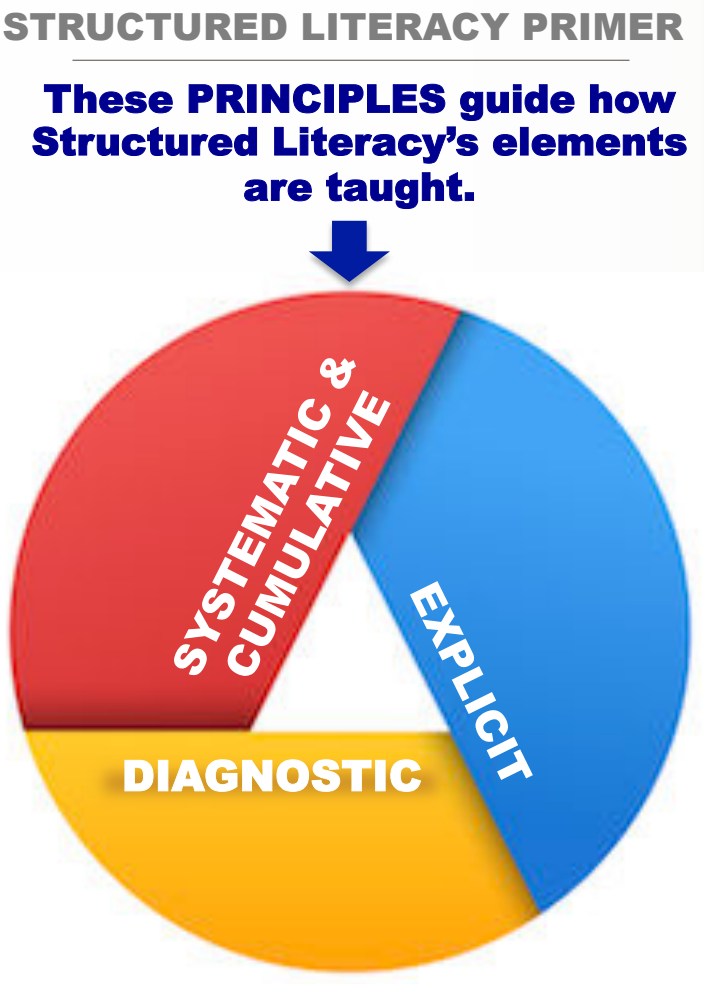
These PRINCIPLES guide how Structured Literacy's elements are taught.



Structured Literacy's
Evidence-Based Teaching Principles

Systematic & Cumulative
Structured Literacy teaching is systematic and cumulative. **Systematic** means that organization of material follows the logical order of language. The sequence begins with the easiest and most basic concepts and elements and progresses methodically to the more difficult. **Cumulative** means each step is based on concepts previously learned.

Explicit Structured Literacy instruction requires direct teaching of concepts with continuous student-teacher interaction and does not assume students deduce concepts. (While **multisensory teaching** lacks the extensive research that validates Structured Literacy's other teaching principles, decades of clinical results support efficacy of simultaneous association of auditory, visual, kinesthetic-motor modalities for enhancing memory and learning in students with dyslexia.)

Diagnostic Teachers must be adept at individualizing instruction (even within groups) based on careful and continuous assessment, both informal (e.g., observation) and formal (e.g., with standardized measures). Content must be mastered to the degree of automaticity needed to free attention and cognitive resources for comprehension and oral/written expression.

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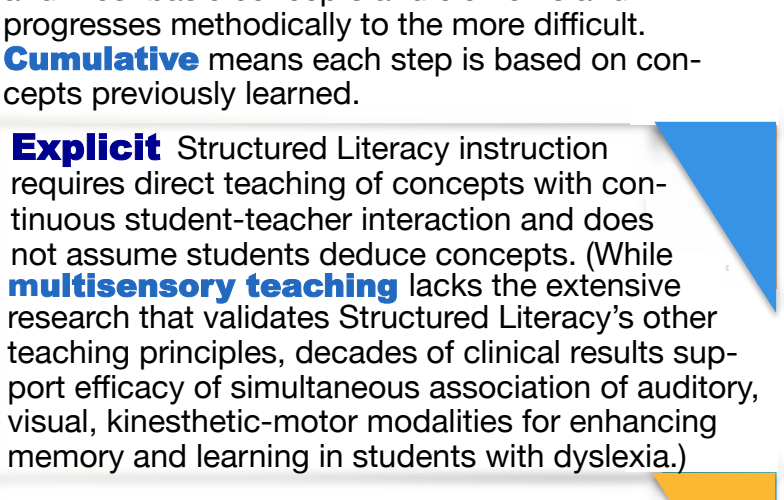
Effective reading instruction for most children incorporates *all* this.

Inner Circle: Elements
Outer Circle: Teaching Principles

To ensure that *all* children have access to effective reading instruction, we must ensure that their teachers have BOTH the ...

✔ **deep content knowledge**
and
✔ **specific teaching expertise**
needed ...



to teach these elements according to these principles.

Learn about the SCIENCE behind Structured Literacy and what all teachers need to KNOW and be able to DO to teach all students to read proficiently.

International Dyslexia Association (DyslexiaIDA.org)
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