



## Structured Literacy Approach

### Who named it a Structured Literacy approach?

*“The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) Board of Directors made a landmark decision designed to help market our approach to reading instruction. The board chose a name that would encompass all approaches to reading instruction that conform to IDA’s Knowledge and Practice Standards. That name is “Structured Literacy.”*

*Today, our successful approach to reading instruction goes by many names: Orton Gillingham, Multi-Sensory, Explicit Phonics. In many schools and districts, our approach is referred to by the name of the organization training teachers. So in Houston, it may be known as “Neuhaus.” In New York or Los Angeles, it may be referred to as “Wilson.”*

In New Zealand, we use the term Structured Literacy approach. We have some amazing New Zealand providers training teachers to implement a Structured Literacy approach in their schools around New Zealand.

We also have the Institute of Multisensory Language Education from Australia that come to New Zealand and train teachers in the approach.

### Why name the term?

The reason we need to have the single term Structured Literacy approach is, that it provides a common practice, a worldwide GOLD standard that must be adhered to if you wish to create your own Structured Literacy approach to teach others or create a Structured Literacy programme to sell. The term gives a clear path to follow and it also gives us a gold standard to adhere to.

From the IDA

*The term refers to both the content and methods or principles of instruction. It means the same kind of instruction as the terms multisensory structured language education and structured language and literacy*

So, let’s answer the biggest question;

# What must be included in a Structured Literacy Approach or a Structured Literacy Programme?

I will try and keep it as simple as I can but it does get a little heavy with jargon. Remember we do have a glossary on the website.

**There are six elements and three principles of instruction on how to teach the 6 components that MUST be included for anyone to call themselves a Structured Literacy approach or a Structured Literacy programme.**

**The six elements or components are:**

**Phonology:** Phonology is the study of sound structure of spoken words. Phonology is a key element of Structured Literacy instruction. Phonemic awareness, which is the ability to distinguish, segment, blend, and manipulate sounds relevant to reading and 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 meaning we also teach **Symbol- Sound. (The alphabetic principle is teaching the 44 sounds in reading (decoding) and spelling (encoding).**

**Syllables:** Knowing the six syllable and vowel grapheme types, helps readers to 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 (comprehension). The Structured Literacy curriculum (from the start) includes instruction in the comprehension and appreciation of written language.

**The three evidence-based teaching principles on how to teach all the six components or elements above are:**

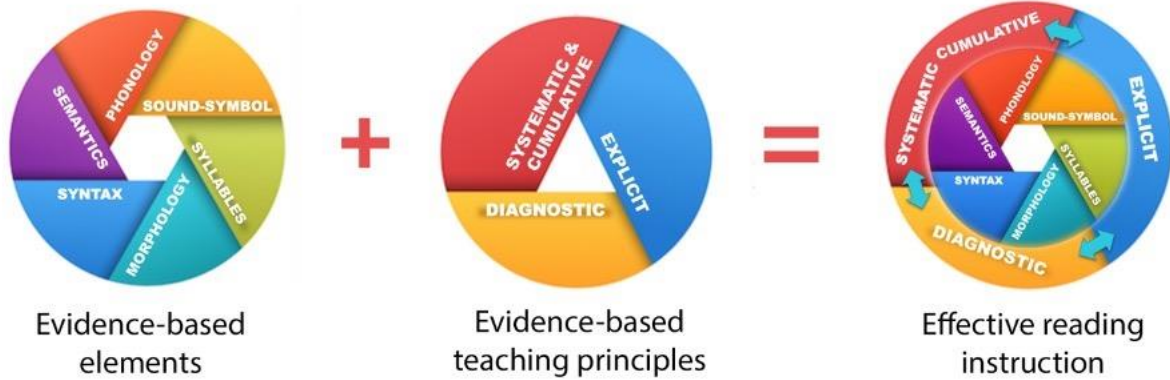
**Systematic and cumulative:** Structured Literacy teaching is systematic and cumulative. Systematic means that the organisation of material follows the logical order of language. The sequence begins with the easiest and most basic concepts and elements and progresses methodically to the more difficult.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

**Explicit:** Structured Literacy instruction requires direct teaching of concepts with continuous student-teacher interaction providing immediate feedback and does not assume students will just pick up the concepts.

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

# Structured literacy

Explicit teaching of systematic word identification  
and decoding strategies



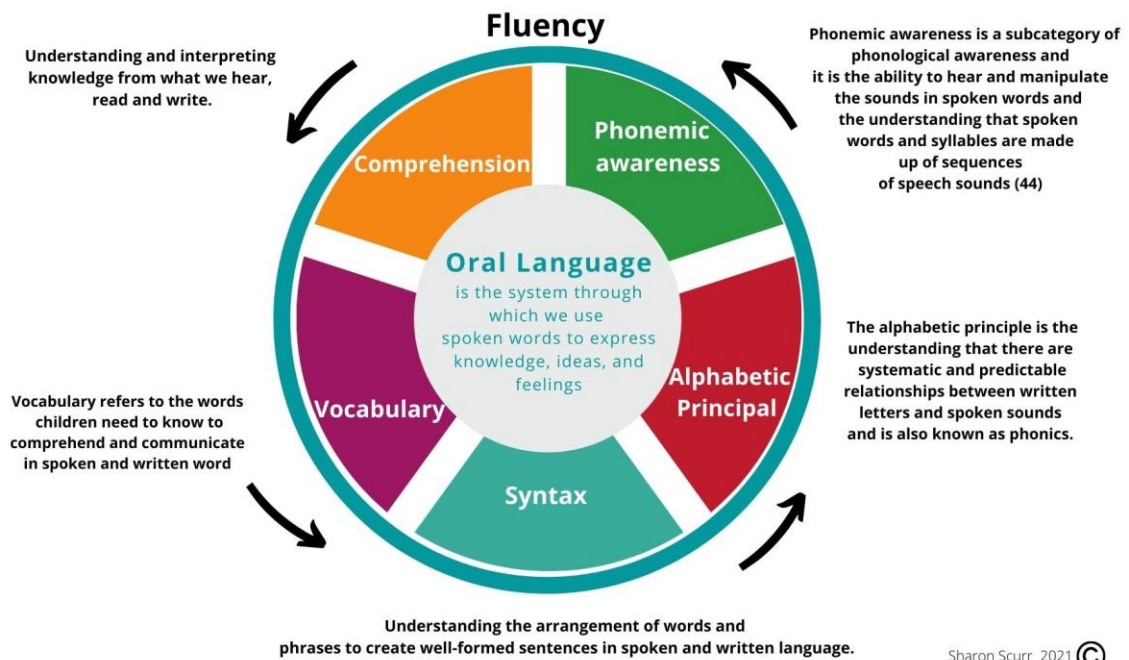
**Source:** © 2016 Cowen for International Dyslexia Association  
<https://app.box.com/s/2yqu2ke21mxs0hz9l77owdlorgvtesyq>

The image shows the six elements in a circle plus a circle of the three principles of teaching in a circle equals what the term Structured Literacy is.

## Oral Language

We also want to highlight the important role that oral language plays in Structured Literacy. Oral language lays the foundation for the reading and writing skills children will develop as they start and progress through school. Having a solid foundation in oral language will help children become successful readers and strong communicators as well as build their confidence and overall sense of well-being. Oral language is the system through which we use spoken words to express knowledge, ideas and feelings. Developing oral language means developing the skills and knowledge that go into listening (receptive) and speaking (expressive). A Structured Literacy lesson does incorporate oral language. To read more about oral language and its role in Structured Literacy go to 'What is Oral Language?'

This image from "What should be included in a Structured Literacy lesson helps show that oral language is at the heart of Structured Literacy.



## What is the difference between a Structured Literacy approach and a Structured Literacy programme?

The definition of approach - Noun: approach; plural noun: approaches a way of dealing with a situation or problem.

The definition of programme - Verb: "arrange according to a plan or schedule"

**An approach** is about changing and adjusting when a situation or problem arises. With a structured literacy approach, your training has provided you with the knowledge of how to provide scaffolding for a problem that may present with a student and help you understand why the problem has happened and what your next step is for that student.

**A programme** has been written to be followed each day using a step-by-step process. It doesn't provide the background knowledge or flexibility to adapt to a student's needs, which is only gained by training in the approach.

A structured literacy programme will have pre-planned lessons to follow each day and week and you continue until you finish the programme. This is why most computer programmes fail children and why they are able to complete them without being able to read at the end of it. Please don't get me wrong, programmes have a place, especially for parents.

The reason I am explaining the difference is, professionals should always be trained in the approach so they have the knowledge to be able to select and use any material or resource that will benefit the student/s in front of them. They must understand the steps that need to precede a skill or gap in knowledge and the steps that follow.

## What is the difference between a Structured Literacy approach and a structured approach to Literacy?

There is actually a lot of difference between the two. At first glance, you may think you are reading the same thing. I call this a clever game of wordplay that many companies worldwide use to sell their products.

A great example is:

You are looking to buy the best environmentally friendly car on the market. You head to your local dealer thinking an electric car is the best option. You did a little research on google and you have made your decision to buy an electric car. You are feeling good about doing your bit for the environment and having no more trips to the petrol station. You arrive at the sales yard but they only have petrol and diesel cars. That's all they sell and it's also what they know about.

Before you know it you are hearing all the similarities to an electric car that the new version of your old petrol car can provide. A car is a car. They all do the same thing, we drive them from A to B and the salesperson is saying all the right things; it's more fuel efficient, costs less at the pump, great safety rating, and has all the bells and whistles your old car doesn't have. Plus, they will give you money if you trade your car in towards the new fuel-efficient petrol car. If you are like me and have no clue about cars, you'll be thinking wow this sounds great. Yes, you will take it !!!!! You are still doing your bit for the environment.

But here is the thing, it is not an electric car. It has parts that align with an electric car and it even has some elements that are environmentally friendly but IT IS NOT an electric car. It is not what you wanted. You wanted to buy an electric car to avoid buying petrol and to have the best environmentally friendly car you could so as to do as much as possible for the environment.

Think of a Structured Literacy approach as the electric car and a structured approach to literacy as the petrol car. When you decide to commit an approach please make sure you understand what you are committing to. Just because it is better than what you had before and has parts that align with an electric car, it doesn't mean it is the best option moving forward.

As this document is for dyslexic children, the approach you must commit to is a Structured Literacy approach. The Ministry of Education agrees that a structured literacy approach is the best practice for dyslexic students.

<https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/dyslexia-and-learning/>

What we recommend on our site [www.deb.co.nz](http://www.deb.co.nz) under "What we recommend" is a list of resources that may only be part of a Structured Literacy programme. They may only cover phonemic awareness or decoding with no encoding. It is very important you know and understand what you are purchasing before you commit money to it. Please refer to our "Guidance for assessing an approach or programme" and "What is the science of reading".

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