

# Guided Reading Essentials

**T**his chapter explains the essential elements of guided reading and how guided reading complements yet differs from other approaches to reading instruction. You will also find steps and guidelines for fostering independence and establishing literacy routines for reading workshop so you can teach guided reading without interruptions.

### A DEFINITION

Guided reading is small-group differentiated instruction that supports students in developing reading proficiency. It acknowledges that children bring different backgrounds and instructional experiences to the reading process and therefore move forward at different rates. The small-group model allows teachers to target specific learning needs, provide appropriate scaffolding, and gradually reduce support to promote independence. Guided reading essentials include small groups, instructional-leveled texts, and targeted teaching.

### Small-Group Instruction

The teacher conducts guided reading in small groups (four to six students), based on each student's individual needs. Groups are flexible. Configurations change as students progress and as the teacher identifies new learning goals. These small groups allow children to feel supported as they take risks to problem-solve texts and construct meaning.

## Slightly Challenging Text

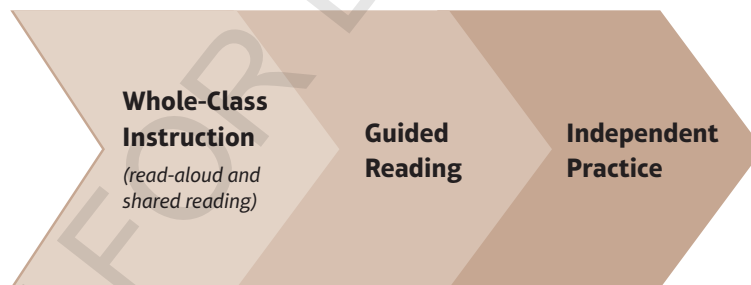
Texts are chosen at the group members' instructional reading level, not at their independent level. In other words, the text should be a tad too hard. As students read, they should encounter challenges that require them to problem-solve and practice strategies that help them comprehend and discuss the passage. Celebrate errors as opportunities for teaching and learning.

## Targeted Teaching

Assessments are critical to guided reading lessons. Use assessments to group students and pinpoint specific skills and strategies students need to learn next. As students read, you will observe, listen, question, prompt, and coach. The interactions between students and the teacher help students internalize the strategy focus so they can apply the skill independently. Teacher involvement is key to acceleration.

## BALANCING THE READING PROGRAM

Guided reading does not stand alone. Each guided reading lesson should build on the lessons you teach the whole class. During whole-class instruction use read-aloud and shared reading experiences to teach state standards. Then, while you teach a guided lesson, other students can practice the state standard and other strategies on texts at their independent level. Guided reading is the scaffold between modeling and independence.



## Read-Aloud

Reading aloud to students is an important component of a reading program at any grade level. It provides opportunities to foster interest and motivation, model fluent reading, engage students in discussing and analyzing a text, and demonstrate comprehension strategies. An interactive read-aloud (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Hoyt,

2009) is a slightly different approach. Its purpose is to encourage reflective thinking and enhance comprehension by guiding students in discussing the text. During an interactive read-aloud, you read a text to students and stop two or three times during the reading to pose questions that encourage deeper thinking. As students turn to a neighbor to talk about the book, they share their thinking and listen to and value the opinions of their classmates. Employ a variety of genres, including nonfiction and poetry, so children can apply comprehension strategies and standards to different kinds of texts.

### **Shared Reading**

Shared reading, conducted with the whole class, is often used for focus lessons (also called mini-lessons). Select a grade-level text that supports a specific instructional focus or reading standard. Primary-grade teachers commonly use big books, charts, or a text displayed on an interactive whiteboard. With intermediate students, shared reading can be done with poetry charts, content area textbooks, novels, anthologies, or short passages. Give students a copy of the text or display it on an interactive whiteboard so they can follow along. As with read-alouds, you should use a variety of genres.

The purposes of shared reading is to teach skills and strategies, increase reading fluency, and support developing readers. The challenge of shared reading is keeping students engaged and focused. To help them stay on task, I suggest limiting shared reading to 10–15 minutes.

### **Independent, Self-Selected Reading**

Create a love for reading by knowing your students' reading interests. Students should have an opportunity each day to read books they select themselves. Allowing them to choose the books they read boosts their reading motivation, but you should monitor the texts to ensure they are not too difficult. I have found that some intermediate students will select texts that are too challenging because they see someone else reading them. The problem is, students will lose interest if they encounter too many unknown words. Teach students how to choose books they will like and are able to read. Independent reading improves automaticity with sight words, increases fluency, and gives students an opportunity to practice the strategies you have taught. During individual reading conferences, you can discuss book selection, teach needed skills or strategies, evaluate progress, and identify the next learning goal. To assess comprehension and monitor accountability, you might want to require a weekly written response related to the student's independent reading notebook.

Summary of Balanced Reading Approaches				
Approach	Grouping	Text Level	How Text Is Read	Purpose
Guided reading	Small group	Student's instructional level	By students while the teacher coaches	Practice reading strategies with teacher support Differentiate instruction based on need
Read-aloud	Whole class	Above grade level	By the teacher	Model fluent reading and reading strategies Support comprehension Expand vocabulary Motivate students to read
Shared reading	Whole class	On grade level	By students and the teacher	Teach strategies and standards Support oral language
Independent, self-selected reading	Individual	Student's independent level (varies by student)	By the student	Promote enjoyment, fluency, and comprehension Practice strategies that have been internalized

## Teaching Independence

As you prepare your students for guided reading, you will need to establish firm routines for working independently or in small groups. Explicitly teach procedures for the literacy activities they will be doing while you teach a guided reading lesson. Students will need to solve problems without asking for your help.

Cathy, a dear friend of mine, attended a guided reading workshop years ago and went back to her classroom thrilled about what guided reading could do for her kindergarten students. The next day she taught her class six literacy centers and a guided reading lesson! What a disaster! She almost quit teaching. When she contacted me, I gave her tips on how to engage children independently in literacy activities so she could teach guided reading lessons without interruption. Cathy is now one of the most polished and effective guided reading teachers I know, but she learned the hard way that children must be taught independence for guided reading to work.

The following six-week schedule for primary grades gradually releases responsibility from the teacher to the students and teaches classroom routines and procedures. If students have worked in stations or centers in previous grades, you may not need the full six weeks; however, I strongly recommend you follow this plan if you teach kindergarten.

## The First Six Weeks, K–1: Teaching Routines and Procedures for Reading Workshop

**Week 1:** Prepare for reading workshop by building community and collaboration. Have students work in small groups for ten minutes each day doing activities they can manage with little direction from you. I call these activities “tub activities” because you can place easy, independent activities in separate plastic or rubber tubs. For example, you might have tubs of nonfiction books, puzzles, blank writing journals, Legos®, coloring books, etc. Tub activities will eventually be replaced by literacy activities as you teach students to be independent learners.

**Week 2:** Introduce a literacy activity to one of the groups each day while the other groups work on tub activities. Literacy activities will vary by grade level, but they should always be authentic reading and writing experiences that build on the whole-class instruction you’ve provided. Examples include reading books, listening to recorded books, and retelling familiar stories.

**Week 3:** Introduce a second literacy activity and lengthen the reading workshop time to 15 minutes.

**Week 4:** Lengthen the reading workshop to 20 minutes and introduce a new literacy activity to one of the groups each day.

**Week 5:** Introduce another literacy activity while other groups work on tub activities or on previously introduced literacy activities. By the end of the fifth week, students should be able to work 30–45 minutes without direct supervision. Continue to assess students, adjust practices, and clarify expectations for each independent literacy activity.

**Week 6:** All students should be working independently with purposeful literacy experiences. The tubs should no longer be required.

After Week 6, as you gradually lengthen the time for reading workshops, teach two or three guided reading groups each day. To maximize engagement, alternate whole-class and small-group instruction. On the next page is a sample schedule based on a 90–100 minute literacy block. Your schedule will reflect the requirements from your district and the needs of your students.



### Sample Reading Workshop Schedule

Time	Instruction
10–15 minutes	Whole-Class Focus Lesson—Read-Aloud (comprehension)
20 minutes	Guided Reading/Independent Literacy Activities
10–15 minutes	Whole-Class Focus Lesson—Shared Reading (poetry, informational text, big book)
20 minutes	Guided Reading/Independent Literacy Activities
10–15 minutes	Whole-Class Focus Lesson—Word Study, Vocabulary, Phonics
20 minutes	Guided Reading/Independent Literacy Activities

### Literacy Activities

The most common question I get from teachers who are new to guided reading is, “What are the other children doing while I’m teaching a small group?” My answer is always, “Keep it simple. They should be reading, writing, listening, and speaking (softly).”

A first-grade teacher in Tampa, Florida, invited me to visit her classroom and offer advice on her guided reading instruction. The only day I had available was the day after winter break, and the only time I had free was the last 30 minutes of the day. (Not the most ideal time for reading lessons!) When I walked into her classroom, I saw six children sitting or standing around a table totally engrossed in writing stories. As soon as they saw me, they asked if they could read their stories to me. (I’ve never had a student ask to read a worksheet to me!) I also saw three children sitting at computers. They were wearing headphones and listening to stories. On the floor were three small circles of four to six students. In the middle of each circle was a stack of guided reading books. One student passed out the books and then said, “Let’s read.” All the children in that circle read the story together. When they finished the book, the leader passed out another. I was amazed at how softly they read with everyone on task. Then in the far corner of the room, I saw the teacher working with a guided reading group. How many “centers” did she have? Only three: reading, writing, and listening. It was simple and it worked!

Independent literacy activities provide an opportunity for students at every grade to engage in purposeful practice while you work with individuals or a small group. When possible, connect the independent activities to the whole-class lesson. If you did an interactive read-aloud, students can write about the book

during independent practice. Primary students might draw pictures and write a few sentences that describe important events that happened in the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Intermediate students might compare the story elements or themes of two picture books you read to them. No matter what students are doing during reading workshop, it is important they understand the procedures and expectations for each activity.

Gail Boushey and Joan Moser (2014) have developed a simple framework for their literacy block. Students not meeting with the teacher for reading instruction do one of the following activities: read to self, read to someone, listen to reading, work on writing, or do word work. The beauty of this approach is that it is easy to manage. Students choose three or four of those activities each day.

You can find plenty of ideas in books and on the Internet about independent literacy activities. Find the activities that work for your students and explicitly teach the routines. Following are some activities I have used. They can be adapted for any grade level.

### **Book boxes**

Students have a personal box or bag that contains a variety of books for independent reading. Include books students have read during guided reading and other easy books they can read without support. This activity gives students an opportunity to develop fluency and practice strategies on easy, familiar texts. At the beginning of kindergarten, include alphabet books, easy nonfiction books, and traditional tales. Although kindergartners will probably not be able to read these books, they can look at the pictures and practice book-handling skills. When you begin guided reading sessions, include books they have read with you so they can increase reading fluency and automaticity with sight words.



### ***Buddy reading***

Students choose a book from their book box to read with another student. The children often sit next to each other so they can see the text at the same time. Buddy reading can be done in several ways: Students can share one book and take turns reading a page; they can take turns reading an entire book from their box; or they can share a book and read chorally. After students read a book, they should briefly retell what they read or heard. You must, of course, teach children how to whisper-read.

### ***Writing***

Students write individually or with a partner and usually continue the work they are doing during writing workshop. Motivation increases if children are allowed to choose their own topics. Some teachers set up a writing corner that includes special writing tools (colored pens, markers, stamps, stickers, sticky notes, colored paper, fancy stationery, etc.). You could establish a message board or post office for students to leave messages for friends and teachers, and have covers of used greeting cards available so students can use them for a personal message.

### ***Readers Theater***

This is a highly motivating way to get students to reread a text. While you teach guided reading, students prepare for a Readers Theater performance by reading and rereading a script. They are not required to memorize or act out the play but are encouraged to use their voices, facial expressions, and hand gestures to interpret the dialogue. Scripts for Readers Theater are available in books and on the Internet. Teachers and students may also adapt favorite stories through collaborative script-writing activities. If you schedule a performance time every Friday, all you have to do to maintain this activity is make new scripts available on Monday. You could assign a script to each group or allow the groups to choose the script they want to perform that week. Obviously, each group should have a different script.

### ***Poems and songs***

Poetry books are a favorite for children of all ages. Each week, teach a new poem to the whole class. Then give each student a copy of the poem to put in their personal poetry notebook. Primary students can illustrate the poem and reread it to themselves or with a buddy. Intermediate students can write about the poems (make connections, expand on the theme, describe figurative language) or use the weekly poem as a mentor text to write their own poem.

Angela Kheradmand from Fairfax County, Virginia, uses poetry notebooks to facilitate cross-age tutoring in her Title I school. Each first-grade student reading below grade level is paired with a sixth grader who has applied to be a reading coach. These partnerships meet every morning during the first 20 minutes of the day to reread the first-grade poetry notebooks. The first graders love the personal attention of the “reading coach,” and the sixth graders enjoy interacting with and helping the lower-grade students.



Although any sixth grader can apply to be a reading coach, Angela was surprised that several struggling readers applied for the position. The 20 minutes of extra reading increased their fluency, too!

### ***ABCs, word study, and spelling***

Kindergartners can match magnetic letters to an alphabet chart, match uppercase and lowercase letters, make classmates’ names, or practice easy sight words you have introduced to the class. To practice letter formation, they can trace their names with colored dry-erase markers. Once you begin word study lessons, students can sort words or make spelling words out of magnetic letters.

### ***Word wall***

If you have a classroom word wall, students can use special materials such as glitter markers, magnetic letters, or Magna Doodles™ to copy the wall words. Any phonics skill that has been taught to the whole group can be practiced using the words on the word wall. Students can find words with short or long vowel sounds, silent e, initial or final consonant blends, words within a word, inflectional endings, etc.

### ***Listening to recorded stories***

Students listen to recorded stories and follow along with copies of the text. After the reading, they can respond to the story by softly retelling it with a partner, drawing a picture of their favorite part, writing three sentences that retell the beginning, middle, and end (B-M-E), writing a Five-Finger Retell (second or third grade), or doing a story map.

### ***Oral retelling***

Every primary classroom should have a retelling corner. Once you read a book to the class, place it in the retelling corner. Include some retelling props such as three paper plates that have the words *beginning*, *middle*, and *end* (B-M-E) written on them. Or you can take a new garden glove and write a story element on each finger: characters, setting, problem, events, and solution. This becomes the Five-Finger Retell. Students can practice the comprehension strategies described in Chapter 7 of this book with familiar stories. They can ask and answer questions, compare and contrast the settings or characters from two different books, identify the main idea, etc. Whatever comprehension strategy you have taught during whole-class instruction can be practiced using familiar stories.

### ***Computer***

Use software that reinforces skills you have already taught the class. Never expect computers to teach new skills or strategies. Computers cannot take the place of teachers, but they can be useful in reinforcing learning. Students can sort words by their spelling features, write stories, or use educational software that focuses on phonemic awareness.

### ***Research related to content areas***

Students work on projects related to content areas. They can work individually or in small groups to research a topic and prepare a presentation that summarizes their learning.

## **Literacy Activities for the Intermediate Grades**

Although many of the activities described above can be adapted for intermediate students, I prefer that those students read self-selected books and write about them while the teacher does guided reading.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

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The chapters that follow focus on guided reading lessons at a specific stage of reading (i.e., pre-A, emergent, early, transitional, and fluent). The procedures are organized around an Assess-Decide-Guide framework to help you take the next step forward in guided reading instruction.

## QUESTIONS TEACHERS ASK ABOUT GUIDED READING

### *How is guided reading different from literature circles?*

In literature circles (also called book clubs), students read the same book and meet in small groups a few times a week to discuss it. They are taught to express their opinions, predictions, and questions. Some teachers ask students to take on specific roles, such as summarizer, director, and investigator, to provide more structure for the discussion. As students become more skilled in literature circle conversations, they move beyond those roles.

Guided reading and literature circles can coexist in the intermediate classroom. In guided reading, the teacher uses assessment results to form groups and select a challenging text that meets a specific comprehension focus. While he or she is working with the group, other students can be reading their literature circle novel and preparing for the discussion.

	Guided Reading	Literature Circles
Groups	Needs-based by teacher	Student-selected by interest
Text level	Students' instructional level	Students' independent level
Genre	Short texts or selected excerpts: fiction, informational, poetry	Mostly fiction/novels
How the text is read	With teacher prompting and scaffolding	Independently
How the text is discussed	With teacher scaffolding and guidance	Without teacher support
Primary purpose	Improve strategic processing	Encourage thoughtful discussion and a love of reading

### *How do I get everything done in the allotted time?*

If you truly want to get everything in, you need to keep to your schedule. Use a timer for guided reading and whole-class lessons. See the suggested reading workshop schedule on page 18.



### ***How do I know students are actually reading their self-selected books?***

You can monitor self-selected reading in a variety of ways:

- *Reading conference.* Schedule a short weekly conference with students who are not engaged during independent reading. Check the text level. Help them find books they like and can read.
- *Written responses.* Have students write a one-page response to the book they are reading, possibly connecting the response to your whole-class instruction. For example, if your focus lessons have been about making inferences based on a character's actions, have students write about three places in their book where they made that type of inference.
- *Reading logs.* Ask students to keep a log of the books they have read.
- *Impromptu book talks.* Each day ask a few students to talk briefly about their independent reading books.

### ***How can I keep children from interrupting me while I teach guided reading?***

- Demonstrate and practice routines so students know exactly what to do during all parts of reading workshop, including guided reading.
- Do not respond to children who interrupt you during guided reading. If you do, they will continue interrupting.
- Place a couple of chairs on either side of the guided reading table. If students become disruptive, ask them to sit in the chairs and read from their book boxes while you teach your lesson to the other students. When the lesson is over, you can deal with the problem.

A reading notebook is a tool for monitoring and assessing independent reading and guided reading. Students can take a composition notebook and create dividers for each section, or you can have your district print notebooks for your students. Here are my recommendations for sections of the notebook:

**Part 2: Independent Reading Responses.** Each week, have students write a one-page response to their independent reading book. If they use both sides of the page, they need only about 20 pages for this section.

**Part 4: New Word List.** Save the last seven to ten pages for students to record vocabulary they learned during guided reading and whole-class instruction. Students write the new word in the first column and a synonym for it in the second. Every week or so, test students on words they learned most recently.

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Appendix L

*Go to [scholastic.com/NSFresources](http://scholastic.com/NSFresources) for a downloadable professional study guide written just for this book. In it, you'll find questions and activities about guided reading to use on your own or with your colleagues in a study group or PLC.*