

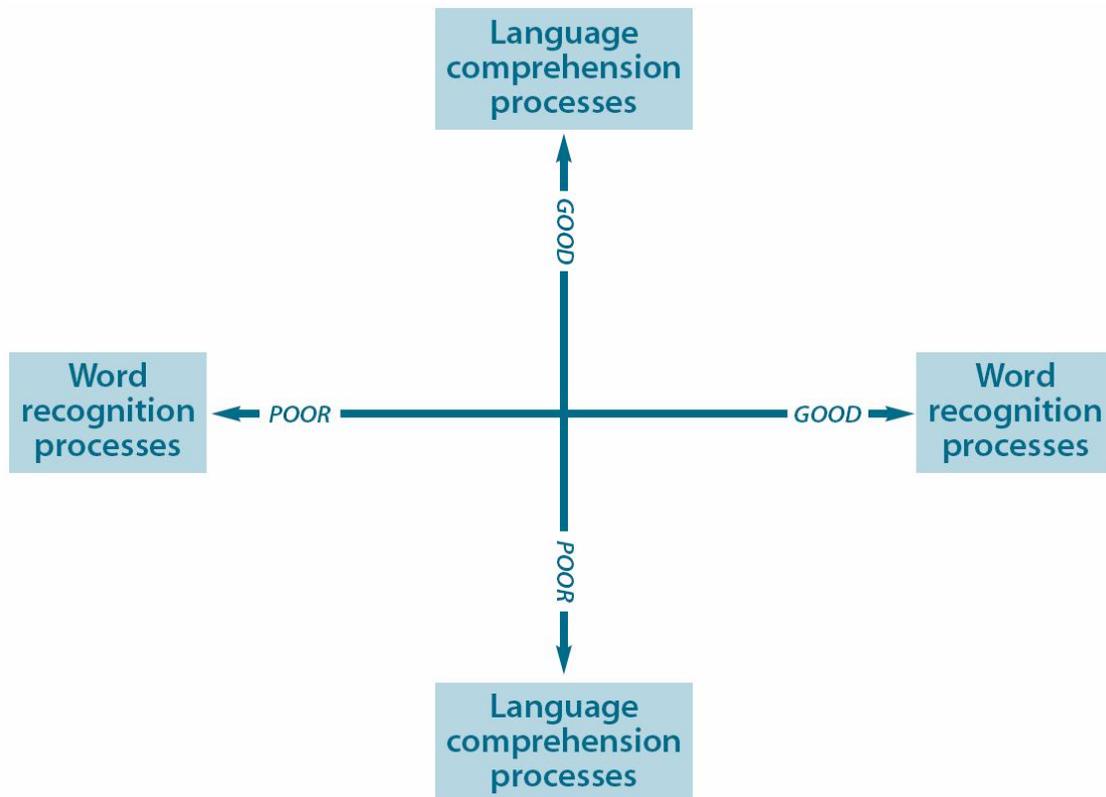
# The new conceptual framework for teaching reading: the ‘simple view of reading’ – overview for literacy leaders and managers in schools and Early Years settings

**Recommendations of the *Independent review of the teaching of early reading* (the Rose Report) March 2006**

The Rose Report acknowledges the contribution the National Literacy Strategy has made to raising standards of attainment in reading in England since its inception in 1998 and to the improved direct teaching of literacy in the primary phase. However, the report also found that the Searchlights model of reading promoted by the Strategy has now been overtaken by more recent research and concludes that it is now time to move on from this model in order to support teachers and practitioners to further improve their teaching of early reading. It recommends the adoption of a different conceptual framework: the ‘simple view of reading’ <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/rosereview/finalreport/>. This conceptual framework identifies two components of reading: ‘word recognition’ and ‘language comprehension’, both of which are essential to developing fluent and effective reading, and both of which require specific kinds of teaching.

*‘Further progress toward the goal of using evidence derived from psychological research to inform teaching practice will be better achieved if the searchlights model is now reconstructed into the two components of reading (word recognition, language comprehension) that are present but confounded within it.’* *Independent review of the teaching of early reading*, Appendix 1, paragraph 9, page 75

Figure 1: The ‘simple view of reading’



**What is the ‘simple view of reading’?**

As shown in Figure 1, the ‘*simple view of reading*’ proposes that skilled reading entails development of a set of processes by which the words on the page are recognised and understood (i.e. word recognition processes), and development of increasingly sophisticated language comprehension processes, by which texts as well as spoken language are understood and interpreted. Learning to read therefore involves setting up processes by which the words on the page can be recognised and understood, and continuing to develop the language comprehension processes that underlie both spoken and written language comprehension. Both sets of processes are necessary for reading, but neither is sufficient on its own. Children who cannot adequately recognise the words on the page are by that fact alone prevented from fully understanding the text; however,

recognising and understanding the words on the page is no guarantee that the text will be understood.

*‘Different kinds of teaching are needed to develop word recognition skills from those that are needed to foster the comprehension of written and spoken language.’ Independent review of the teaching of early reading, Appendix 1, paragraph 18, page 77*

It follows that when practitioners and teachers undertake reading activities, including shared, guided and discrete teaching of reading, they need to think carefully about which component of reading they intend to focus on.

#### **The implications of the ‘simple view of reading’ for the Searchlights model**

The report recommends that the NLS Searchlights model should be reconstructed to take full account of word recognition and language comprehension as distinct processes, albeit both essential to securing effective reading. The report makes clear that there is a different weighting to these processes as children become increasingly fluent and accurate readers. Children need to acquire and practise certain skills in the early stages of reading in order to develop fluent automatic word reading, whereas the abilities to understand and appreciate written texts continue to develop throughout life. Development of fluent and automatic word reading skills is based on acquisition and use of phonic knowledge. This is acknowledged in the report’s recommendation that the Primary National Strategy should now take forward the conceptual framework of the ‘simple view of reading’ to support quality-first teaching of early reading, with an appropriate focus on teaching phonic knowledge and skills as the prime approach to the teaching of early reading.

*‘The knowledge, skills and understanding that constitute high-quality phonics work should be taught as the prime approach in learning to decode (to read) and encode (to write/spell) print.’ Independent review of the teaching of early reading, paragraph 240, page 70*

The ‘simple view of reading’ replaces the Searchlights model. The knowledge and skills within the four Searchlights strategies are subsumed within the two dimensions of word recognition and language comprehension of ‘the simple view of reading’. For beginner readers, priority should be given to securing word recognition knowledge and skills. This means that ‘high-quality phonic work’, as defined in the Rose Report, should be the prime approach used when teaching beginners to read and spell.

#### **Ensuring that children develop word recognition and language comprehension**

In the early years of learning to read, teachers need to focus on helping children develop their word recognition skills. Initially the focus is on helping children to master the alphabetic code, apply their phonic knowledge and skills as they decode words and develop a store of familiar words – developing automaticity in

their word reading. This work is set alongside work on developing speaking and listening skills, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development and language comprehension.

However, as children develop in their reading, attention should be paid to the transition from learning to read to reading to learn, where the balance of word recognition and language comprehension changes. Language comprehension will be developing alongside the growing skills of word recognition and as stated in the report, ‘phonic work should be time-limited, whereas work on comprehension continues throughout life’ (*Independent review of the teaching of early reading*, paragraph 129, page 39).

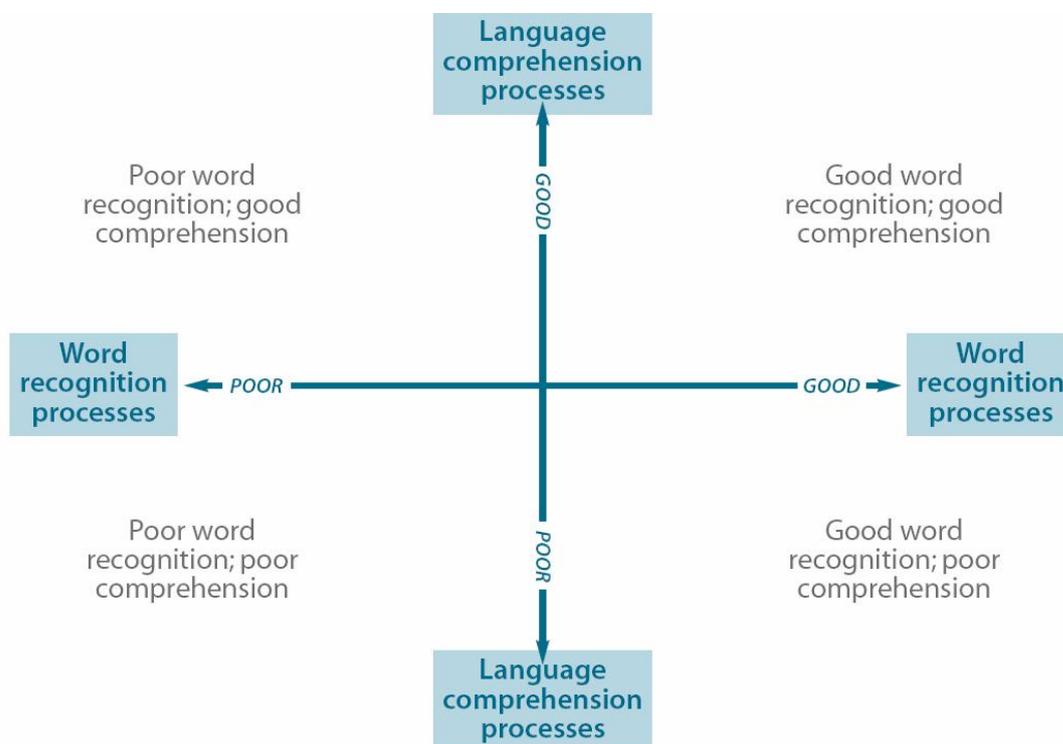
The focus of teaching for later reading development will emphasise comprehension and response as children develop as critical and fluent readers, moving from learning to read, to reading to learn, engaging and interacting with a wide range of texts for purpose and pleasure.

In summary, the dimensions of word recognition and language comprehension processes are distinct but both are needed to secure effective reading in the longer term. Teaching needs to be staged so that priority is given to the development of word-reading processes in the early stages of learning to read, with a switch towards a greater emphasis on the teaching of language comprehension as children secure their knowledge of the alphabetic code and ‘developing the abilities necessary to understanding and appreciating written texts in different content areas and literary genres’. (*Independent review of the teaching of early reading*, paragraph 19, page 78)

#### **Children perform differently in the two dimensions of word reading and language comprehension**

Teachers need to be clear about children’s performance and progress in each of the two dimensions of word recognition and language comprehension and Figure 2, *Different patterns of performance* below, illustrates the four patterns of performance which reflect relative differences in the balance of word recognition and language comprehension abilities. Teachers need to monitor children’s performance and progress carefully against these different patterns.

Figure 2. Different patterns of performance



Children may fall into any one of the four quadrants in the figure above. It is important that teachers recognise that ‘the four patterns of performance reflect relative differences in the balance of word comprehension and language comprehension abilities: as both dimensions are continuous, children can vary continuously on each.’ (*Independent review of the teaching of early reading*, Appendix 1, paragraph 30, page 80)

As teachers assess children’s performance and progress within both word recognition and language comprehension processes, they need to identify children’s particular learning needs and use this analysis to guide further teaching.

**Development of word recognition skills**

Children need to be taught:

- grapheme–phoneme (letter/sound) correspondences (the alphabetic principle) in a clearly defined, incremental sequence

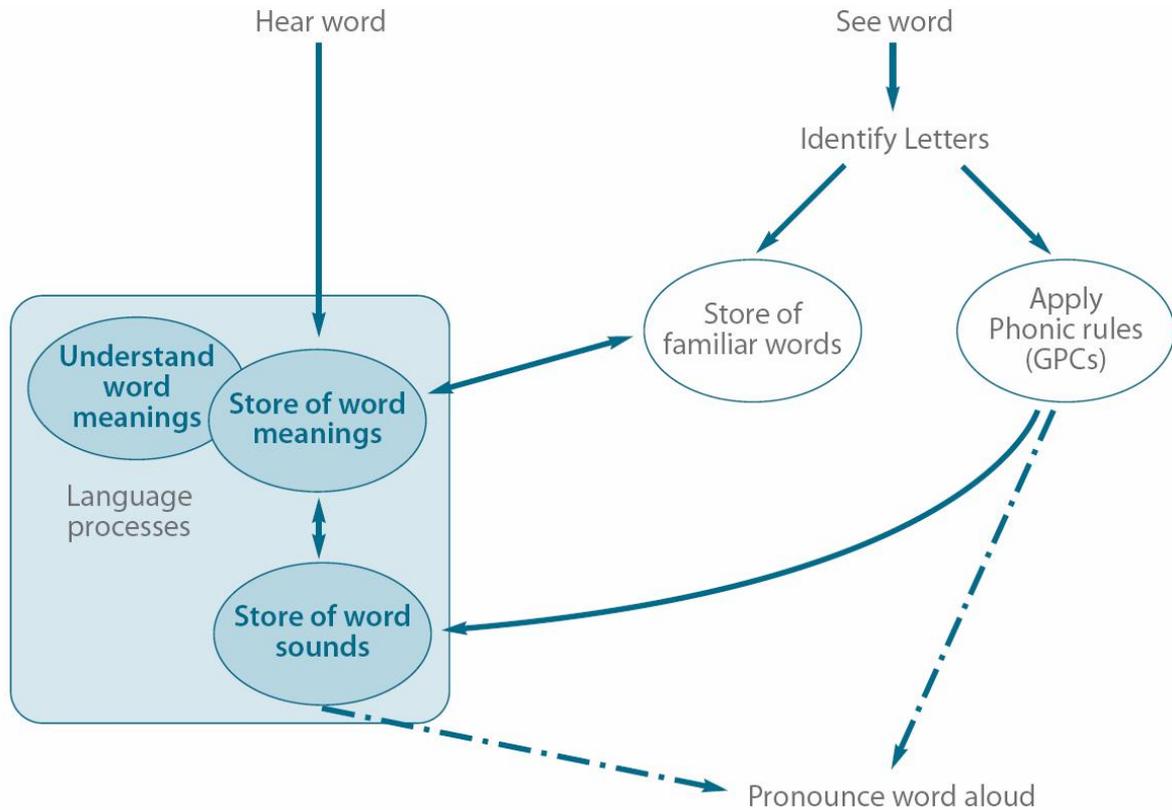
- to apply the highly important skill of blending (synthesising) phonemes in order, all through a word to read it
- to apply the skills of segmenting words into their constituent phonemes to spell them
- that blending and segmenting are reversible processes

*'The sequence of teaching phonic knowledge and skills should be such that children should have every opportunity to acquire rapidly the necessary phonic knowledge and skills to read independently.'* *Independent review of the teaching of early reading*, paragraph 86, page 28

To develop their word recognition skills, beginner readers need to do the following.

- Set up processes for identifying letters.
- Acquire a store of essential phonic rules, processes to link graphemes to phonemes and blend phonemes into words. In the first instance, the store of phonic rules will contain the single letter–sound correspondences that are typically the first rules children are taught. Development involves expanding the number of stored rules and incorporating increasingly complex and conditional rules.
- Establish a store of familiar words that are recognised immediately on sight and linked to their meanings. Development involves expanding the store of words and completing their representations (storing all letters of the word in the correct sequence). The term 'sight vocabulary' is a shorthand label for this store.

Figure 3: Diagrammatic representation of the word recognition system



Understanding and application of the alphabetic principle underpin not only the application of phonic rules to decode words but also the ease with which a store of sight vocabulary is developed. As the store of sight vocabulary expands and representation of words in it becomes more complete, many – if not most – children develop a ‘self-teaching’ mechanism, which enables them to infer more sophisticated, complex and conditional phonic rules (see the Rose Report, paragraph 56, page 87).

For further and more specific guidance on the implications of the Rose Report for the teaching of early reading, please see *Phonics and early reading*, available on the electronic Framework.

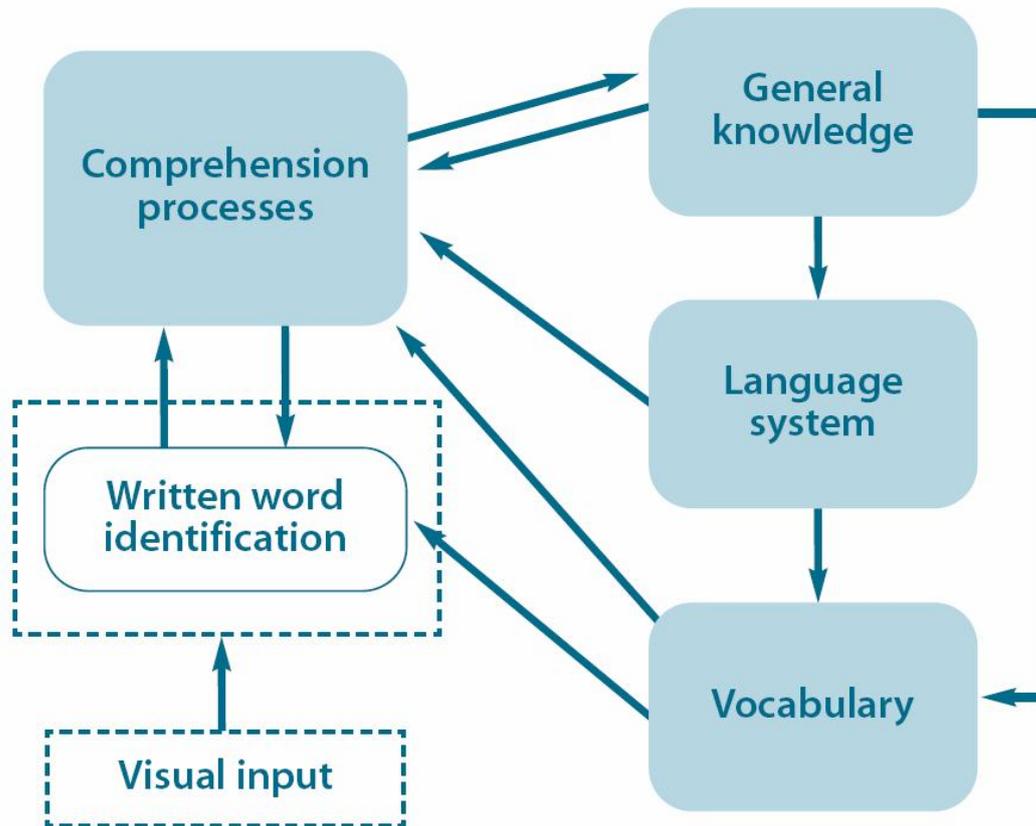
#### Developing language comprehension skills

The idea that reading comprehension depends on oral language skill is captured in the ‘simple view of reading’. According to this conceptual framework, comprehension means understanding of language whether it is spoken or written.

*'Comprehension occurs as the listener builds a mental representation of the information contained within the language that a speaker is using... the listener's general knowledge and level of cognitive development will have a bearing on the comprehension of the message. To generate an accurate mental representation... the listener has to process the language and the concepts.'*  
*Independent review of the teaching of early reading, paragraph 61, page 88*

The comprehension processes children use to understand written texts are the same as those they already use to understand spoken messages. The difference lies in the fact that children access written texts through their eyes rather than via their ears. They have to incorporate visual word identification processes into the comprehension system, but the system remains the same be it for oral or written language.

Figure 4: The components of the comprehension system



Word recognition is vital to reading comprehension; if children cannot recognise written words, then they will quite obviously be unable to extract meaning from them. However, once words are recognised and understood, children must activate their oral language comprehension to understand what a writer conveys. There is widespread acknowledgment that children vary in the ease with which they can read the words on the page; they also vary in their listening comprehension, and hence in their reading comprehension.

From an educational perspective, what this means is that teachers must foster the development of oral language skills in order to safeguard children's reading comprehension. Teachers also need to support the development of specific strategies for reading comprehension and, importantly, they need to encourage children to practise their developing reading skills.

For further and more specific guidance on the implications of the Rose Report for the teaching of comprehension, please see *Progression in comprehension* and *Teaching comprehension*, available on the electronic framework.

### **Key messages**

Teachers and practitioners need to understand:

- the new conceptual framework, the ‘simple view of reading’
- the cognitive processes involved in the development of both accurate word recognition skills and language comprehension
- the fact that children may not necessarily show equal performance or progress in each dimension.

Teachers need to be aware that:

- careful assessment of children’s performance and progress in each dimension will help them to identify children’s learning needs and guide further teaching
- different kinds of teaching are needed to develop word recognition skills from those that foster the comprehension of written and spoken language.