

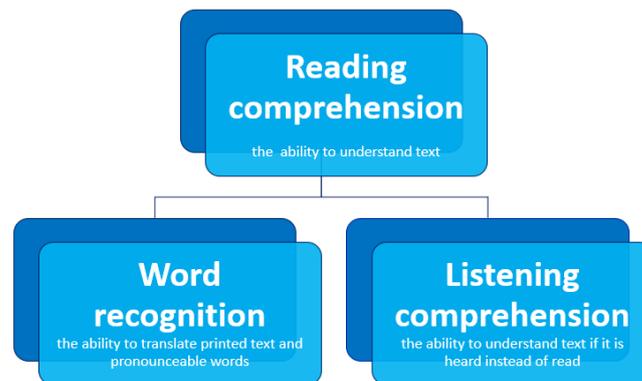
## ***The Simple View of Reading – how simple is it?***

(Talkabout: SLPs and The Curriculum, Volume 33 Number 02, Summer 2020. Jennifer Peach, Principal Speech Language Advisor, Reading and Writing Centre)

The Simple View of Reading was proposed by Gough and Tunmer in 1986 to clarify the role of decoding in reading comprehension. There is a large and growing body of research that supports the Simple View as a valid conceptual framework for understanding the broad landscape of reading; in English (Hoover and Gough 1990; Kershaw and Schatschneider 2012; Oakhill, Cain and Bryant 2003; Tilstra, McMaster, van den Broek, Kendeou and Rapp 2009); other languages (de Jong and van der Leij 2002; Kendeou, Papadopoulos and Kotzapolou 2012; Protopapas, Simos, Sideridis, & Mouzaki, 2012); and across disabilities (Society for the Scientific Study of Reading 2019).

At the core of the Simple View of Reading is the premise that reading comprehension, the ability to understand and gain meaning from text, is the reason we read. The Simple View proposes that reading comprehension, the ability to understand text, is the product of decoding printed text (word reading) and understanding language accessed through the process of decoding (listening comprehension). Listening comprehension draws on the same language processes used to comprehend language via text, but without the cognitive demands of having to decode text (Hogan, Adlof and Alonzo 2015).

The significant aspect of the Simple View of Reading is that reading is conceptualised as a product of both components rather than an accrual. If one component is poor or non-existent, reading comprehension competency will not be achieved. Clearly being able to decode the words on a page is vital to reading comprehension; if students cannot read the words, then they are unable to extract meaning from the written text. Once words are successfully decoded, students need to use their underlying oral language comprehension to understand what is being communicated. So some students may be able to decode all the words on a page, but if their underlying language system is not developed then comprehension will not occur.



Gough and Tunmer 1986; Castles et al 2009; Ebert and Scott 2016

Figure 1 illustrates the Simple View of Reading, including key components— word reading and listening comprehension. In 2018, Catts framed reading comprehension as not so much a skill but rather a condition we create; we create it by building students' foundations in all of the component skills underpinning word recognition and listening comprehension.

The extended 'identification and intervention of reading disorders' model compiled at the Reading and Writing Centre can be used as a bottom-up model to inform the early identification of students at-risk for reading difficulties, or as a top-down model to guide the differential diagnostic process for students presenting with persistent reading comprehension difficulties.

Word reading requires skills in phonemic decoding – the ability to apply skills in phonemic awareness with knowledge of the orthographic code to sound out words; sight word reading – of high frequency words and words committed to memory through the process of orthographic mapping; and fluency in the decoding of words in text. These skills will not develop unless the student has solid foundations in phonological processing, the detection, discrimination and accessing of speech sounds. Deficits in phonological processing stem from a common source, namely, deficiencies in the quality of phonological representations. Phonological representations refers to the storage of phonological information about words in long-term memory (Sutherland and Gillon 2005).

The skills required for word reading can be described as constrained skills because they are a finite set of skills. While they are generally acquired and included in the curriculum in Prep to Year 2, they are important early and remain so throughout, particularly for students with word level reading difficulties. For example, a 2017 study by Adwan-Mansour and Bitan, testing the correlation of phonemic awareness with reading of trained words, showed that phonemic awareness ability contributes to reading acquisition even in adults learning a novel orthography. Constrained skills are relatively easy to manualise, teach and assess. In fact much more is known about how to identify, successfully intervene with, and monitor progress in students who have difficulty with decoding than those with comprehension problems.

Conversely, listening comprehension skills are called unconstrained skills because there is no limit to the amount of language you can learn in your lifetime. There are fewer reliable and valid progress monitoring tools available and less is known about how to gauge adequate progress. In addition because of the many factors that may influence comprehension, individual poor comprehenders' underlying instructional needs may vary greatly, and interventions may be complex.

The components of listening comprehension include what are sometimes referred to as lower and higher level language skills. Lower level language skills, vocabulary, grammar and syntax emerge relatively quickly and easily for the majority of children. Vocabulary, including knowledge and understanding of word meanings as well as the ability to retrieve words and use them appropriately, and grammar, are essential in the comprehension process as they enable understanding of the words and individual sentences in a text. They are used to construct the representation of the literal meaning of a text, referred to by some as the textbase.

Successful comprehenders however go beyond single-word and sentence comprehension and the textbase; they construct a representation of the text referred to as a *mental model*. Higher level language skills of inference, comprehension monitoring and text structure knowledge are required to construct a mental model of a text's meaning.

The contribution of individual differences of word reading and listening comprehension to reading comprehension varies across the year levels. In the early years of reading development, children's ability to comprehend text is largely constrained by individual differences in decoding printed text. Almost all children arrive at reading instruction with better spoken language skills than early word reading skills. However, once decoding becomes automatic, at around 8 years of age, reading comprehension is largely dependent upon skills in language comprehension (Catts, Hogan and Adlof 2005). By Year 8 almost all of the reliable variance in reading comprehension can be explained by the listening comprehension factor (Adlof, Catts and Little 2006). In the early years, children targeted for reading supports are often those with poor word reading. Children with language comprehension difficulties may not be identified until later years as students move to more linguistically challenging texts. Students who are able to decode but have difficulties comprehending due to language deficits often go unnoticed, as they may compensate with a range of other skills to mask their difficulties (Snowling 2017).

Using the Simple View of Reading as a theoretical framework, students who are unable to develop adequate reading comprehension skills can be categorised into three main groups:

- significant word reading difficulties in the absence of listening comprehension problems
- adequate word reading skills, but significant listening comprehension difficulties; and
- weaknesses across both word reading and listening comprehension.

Further investigation of the component skills that underpin word reading and listening comprehension allow us to develop a Reader profile which pinpoints an individual student's strengths and challenges in reading comprehension. This profile can then be used to inform evidence-based interventions, instructional strategies and differentiated curriculum.

Learning to read is a complex and dynamic system with multiple points of vulnerability for children with language learning needs and developmental disabilities (Catts, Nielsen, Bridges and Liu 2016; Murphy, Justice, O'Connell, Pentimonti and Kaderavek 2016). As speech language pathologists in education we have a critical role to play in prevention, identification, and management of literacy difficulties from infancy to adolescence (Speech Pathology Australia 2016).

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