

Reading and LDs: A Snapshot

What is Reading?

Reading is one of those remarkable things that most people do without understanding how or why it works -- we just learn to read, and then we use our ability to read to keep learning.

Of course, it isn't that easy for many people, and it only seems easy to those who don't struggle with it. Reading is a very complicated skill, and our use of the written word has had a massive impact on our world.

Basics of Reading.

Reading and writing developed along with civilization, several thousand years ago in the ancient Middle East, and was probably used initially to record financial transactions. Writing uses abstract symbols to represent sounds and combinations of sounds to share facts and ideas. Reading is the process of taking and understanding that information from written language. And the more we learn about how it all works, the more complex it appears. The skill of reading has two main parts: the mechanical elements (decoding), and comprehension.

Mechanical Elements of Reading

To successfully learn to read, an individual must learn:

- how to use spoken language
- that spoken language is made up of individual sounds
- the Alphabet (or other character systems) – the names, sounds, shapes and formation of letters or syllables
- the direction in which written text must be read
- that written words are made up of letters and syllables
- to recognize words on sight, and identify new words by using the rules of written language and context
- to do these things automatically, in order to be able to focus on the meaning of the writing (comprehension)

Comprehension

Once students understand and are fluent in the mechanics of reading, they can begin to really understand what's being read. Comprehension is thought to pass through stages just as the mechanical elements do:

- first, students read for factual information



- next, students learn to look for and find the main ideas of written text, and to compare and contrast ideas in text
- finally, students learn to analyse and synthesize: to draw conclusions, and to make reasonable inferences

For many students, the skill of reading is learned through exposure and practice – the regular school experience. However, for those with certain types of learning disabilities (and others) the skill of reading is not learned easily or presents significant ongoing difficulties. Reading and

Learning Disabilities.

There are many places in the process of learning to read where things can get off track. Similarly to math, reading is an accumulation of skills, and missing out on an early element will impact later elements negatively; for example, if the mechanical elements don't become automatic, comprehension skills can't fully develop. Problems can occur at any of the learning stages mentioned above.

What Helps?

Identify the Problem.

In all cases, identifying where the problem begins is crucial to figuring out how to fix it. The problem may be a simple knowledge gap, which, when addressed, is permanently corrected; it can also be a neurologically based learning issue like an LD.

Start Early.

In cases of knowledge gaps, if they are noticed early on, through early screening and intervention processes like the Web Based Teaching Tool, weaknesses can be addressed and larger lags avoided.

In cases of LDs, early identification allows for timely interventions to begin; these can include finding appropriate remediation methods, alternative teaching strategies and accommodations, such as assistive technologies, which, once learned, can level the playing field for the student.

Be Sensitive.

Early identification of the problem and timely intervention are the ideal situations, as they allow young students to get back on track and/or find appropriate approaches without having to endure the social/personal negative effects of struggling in school. For older students and adults the cumulative social/personal negative effects of struggling in school need to be addressed along with gaps in reading skills.

More information on this and related topics can be found online at www.LDAO.ca. This snapshot was created in Summer 2007. Please share freely, but do not reproduce for purposes of resale.