

# PFA Tips

## Learning to Read Understanding the Process

Sitting with a child or an adult who struggles to read a word or comprehend a paragraph provides unique insight into the learning process. How do you know if you or someone you love has a learning difficulty? What are some of the causes of learning disabilities? What are some of the symptoms? The following stories, causes, and symptoms may surprise you.

*Buzz has learned phonics and can sound out words, but he reads paragraphs very slowly. He often has to sound out the same word multiple times, not remembering it. He makes mistakes such as reading “basket” for “breakfast” and struggles with spelling.*

The primary cause of the difficulty with reading and spelling is weak symbol imagery—the ability to visualize sounds in letters in words. Many individuals, even those who have well-developed phonetic processing, have difficulty rapidly perceiving sounds in words, and are thus slow to self-correct their reading errors. Their spelling is often phonetically accurate, but they cannot remember the visual patterns of words.

*In contrast to Buzz, Sophie reads words accurately, but she cannot comprehend the content. She has difficulty connecting to language she reads or language she hears. Words seem to go in one ear and out the other. People think she is not trying, and she has been labeled with a “motivation” or “attention” problem.*

The primary cause of language comprehension problems is difficulty creating an imaged gestalt, or whole, from oral and written language. This is called weak concept imagery. This weakness causes individuals to only process “parts” of information they read or hear, but not the whole. These individuals have difficulty with reading comprehension, critical thinking, and may not easily follow directions or connect to conversations. They may also have a hard time expressing ideas in an organized manner.

Reading is an integration of processing skills: word attack, sight word recognition, contextual fluency, oral vocabulary, and comprehension.

There are three sensory-cognitive functions that underlie reading and comprehension and need to be in place to support development in literacy and numeracy:

1. **Phoneme awareness** which is the ability to auditorily perceive sounds within words.
2. **Symbol imagery** which is the ability to create mental imagery for sounds and letters within words.
3. **Concept imagery** which is the ability to create mental representations for the whole; it is dynamic imagery of actions, scenes, movement, etc.

While individuals may have differences in their abilities, the processes needed for reading are universal.

### Additional Resources

Lindamood-Bell  
<https://lindamoodbell.com/>

Reading and Word-Attack Strategies  
[https://www.readinga-z.com/newfiles/strat/read\\_strat.html](https://www.readinga-z.com/newfiles/strat/read_strat.html)

Fix-up Strategies  
[http://www.busyteacherscafe.com/literacy/fixup\\_strategies.html](http://www.busyteacherscafe.com/literacy/fixup_strategies.html)



**Word Attack:** the ability to correctly sound out letters and/or words.

**Sight Word Recognition:** not all written words are regular ones that can be decoded easily. Some words are irregular or difficult to decode. They must be memorized and recognized by sight.

**Contextual Fluency:** the combination of overall reading ability and comprehension.

**Oral Vocabulary:** refers to words that we use in speaking or recognize in listening.

**Comprehension:** the action or capability of understanding something.

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