PARTICIPANT GUIDE

How to Teach Reading in Grades 6–12 (Fast!)

Even If No One Taught You How

Dr. Jenny French · Booth 68 · Indianapolis JW Marriott

Most secondary teachers were trained to teach their content, not reading. Yet 7 in 10 students aren't reading on grade level, and intervention can't reach them all. This guide gives you the research, the reader profiles, and the classroom routines to strengthen Tier 1 reading in every subject, starting tomorrow.

WHAT WE KNOW

70%
of students are not reading on grade level
NAEP, 2024

80%
of school initiatives fail
Reeves, 2019

#1
The principal is the top factor in whether an instructional initiative succeeds
Grissom et al., 2021

> "The history of American education includes a graveyard of good ideas, condemned by pressure for fast results."
>
> *Stigler & Hiebert, 1999*

VISIT US AT BOOTH #68

Books, tools, and resources for your school

Conference deals!

The Science of Reading for Grades 4–12: Every Subject, Every Day! — **$30**
Where: Amazon, Engaginglearners.com, Booth #68 (conference price)

The PLC Guide — **$20**
Where: Amazon, Engaginglearners.com, Booth #68 (conference price)

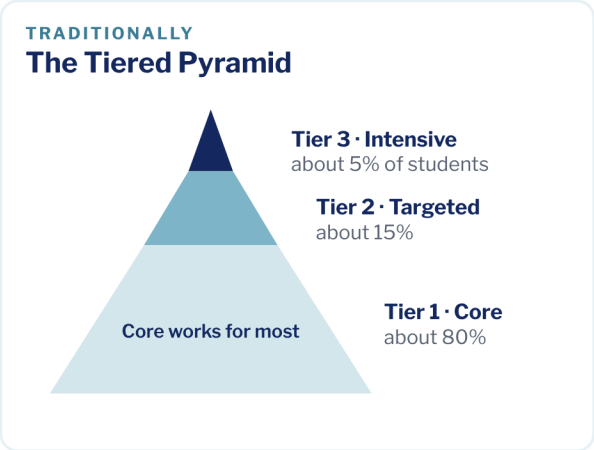
Principal tools: 6–12 reading walkthrough, Tier 1 literacy check, initiative audit — **FREE**
Where: Booth #68

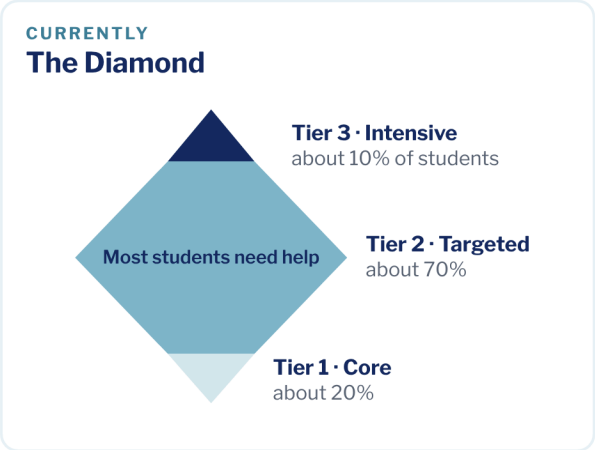
The Reading Gym: secondary intervention curriculum, phonics to fluency — **School pilot**
Where: Ask us at booth #68 or engaginglearners.com

Chart Your Path: a guided workbook for capable, committed, exhausted educators — **$10**
Where: Amazon.com, Booth #68 (conference price) · @drjennyfrench

The Tier 1 problem

Tiered support was designed for a world where core instruction works for most students. In many secondary schools today, the shape has flipped.





Intervention can only support about 20% of students. National averages for students already receiving specialized services: special education about 20%, English learners about 10%, and gifted and talented about 7% (federal data, 2025).

> **"We can't intervene our way out of a Tier 1 problem." So how are we addressing Tier 1?**

Who gets what support?

Intervention (Tier 2 and 3)	Tier 1 core instruction
For: students Stuck in the Driveway (non-decoders)	**For: Gear Grinders and students Lost on the Highway**
Systematic, explicit decoding instruction by trained specialists	A knowledge-rich curriculum used with fidelity
Daily practice at their independent level with age-respectful texts	Research-based literacy strategies in every content area
Your most skilled teachers with your highest-need students	The routines in this guide

Foundational skills cannot be skipped. Students who never received systematic instruction can look like they have a disability. Researchers call them "instructional casualties." Tier 2 should be the same core curriculum at a slower pace, with more scaffolds and practice. Curriculum is the *what*; instruction is the *how*.

Three types of struggling readers

Not every struggling reader needs the same thing. Match the support to the reason the student struggles.

NON-DECODERS
Stuck in the Driveway

Struggle with **decoding and basic phonics**.

TEACH
- Explicit, systematic phonics
- Phonemic awareness activities
- Letter-sound practice and word building

ASSESS
- DIBELS NWF and ORF
- PAST
- RAN (rapid naming)

WHERE
Intervention (Tier 2 and 3) with trained specialists

DYSFLUENT
Gear Grinding

Reading is **slow and choppy**, which gets in the way of comprehension.

TEACH
- Repeated reading
- Scooping (phrasing)
- Prosody and pacing work

ASSESS
- DIBELS ORF
- Words correct per minute (WCPM)
- Reading rate and expression

WHERE
Tier 1, in every content-area class

NON-COMPREHENDERS
Lost on the Highway

Read fluently but **don't consistently understand** or retain what they read.

TEACH
- Vocabulary development
- Strategy instruction
- Building background knowledge
- Scaffolding complex texts

ASSESS
- DIBELS Maze
- Retelling
- Questions and answers

WHERE
Tier 1, in every content-area class

A word study routine for any content area

Use this routine with the academic vocabulary you already teach. In a few minutes, students practice sounds, syllables, morphology, meaning, and spelling, all with your content words.

Step	Science example	Math or science example
1. Say the word	**erosion**	**convergent**
2. Break it into syllables	e · ro · sion	con · ver · gent
3. Map the sounds	e / r / o / zh / u / n	c / o / n / v / r / j / e / n / t
4. Find the morphemes	e + ro(d) + sion "out or away" + "to gnaw" + "act of"	con + verg + ent "together" + "moving or bending" + "characteristic of"
5. Build the meaning	The act of gnawing away	Moving or bending together
6. Give the definition	The process of wearing away material over time	Coming together at one point (adjective)
7. Identify synonyms	erode, corrode, rodent	merging, meeting, converge
8. Apply it	Wind and water cause erosion along the riverbank.	The two roads converged into one. Something that might converge is: _____.

Reading Volume Matters

LIGHT WEIGHTS

Build technique

Decodable passages and shorter texts. Repetition and volume build technique, stamina, and confidence.

MAX LIFT

Build strength

Demanding, grade-level texts build strength through analysis, annotation, and sustained effort.

Students' reading muscles have weakened because teachers have been doing the lifting. Scaffolds are supposed to be temporary.

1 min/day

8,000 words a year

LIKELY TEST PERCENTILE

10th

5 min/day

282,000 words a year

LIKELY TEST PERCENTILE

50th

20 min/day

1.8 million words a year

LIKELY TEST PERCENTILE

90th

Nagy & Herman, 1987

The simple shift: stop reading *for* students. Turn off the audio support, read *with* them chorally, and chunk longer texts with partner reading.

Every text must have…

Before reading

- Build background knowledge
- Preview key vocabulary

→

During reading

- Annotate
- Break down the text
- Think about thinking (metacognition)

→

After reading

- Think
- Write
- Speak

But how do I fit this in?

The question	The answer
How do I support students who can't read when I was trained to teach my content?	Start with the three routines and the word study routine. They use your content and your texts, and they don't require reading-specialist training. Refer non-decoders for intervention.

The question	The answer
How does this work in non-ELA classes?	Every subject has texts and academic vocabulary. Science, social studies, math, and CTE teachers use the same routines with their own readings and words.
How does this fit a prescribed curriculum?	You're not adding content. You're changing *how* students read the texts already in your curriculum.
I only have 50 minutes. How do I fit it all in?	Replace teacher read-alouds and audio with choral or partner reading. Teach vocabulary through the word study routine instead of glossary copying. Same minutes, more student reading.

For school leaders: seven moves for a stronger Tier 1

From The Science of Reading for Grades 4–12: Every Subject, Every Day! (p. 15).

#	Move	First step at my school
1	Use an assessment that separates word recognition from language comprehension.	
2	Rebrand intervention time so students feel respected (try "linguistics").	
3	Appoint your most skilled teachers as interventionists.	
4	Invest in literacy PD for ELA, science, and social studies teachers.	
5	Implement a quality Tier 1 curriculum in all core subjects, with fidelity.	
6	Give non-decoders systematic, explicit reading instruction.	
7	Give all readers daily practice with age-respectful texts.	

> "When we know better, we do better." *The Reading League*

BRING THIS WORK TO YOUR SCHOOL

Help every teacher become a reading teacher.

- **Science of Reading PD for grades 4–12:** for teachers in every content area.
- **Literacy and instructional coaching:** in classrooms, with modeling and feedback.
- **Leadership support:** Tiers 1-3 planning, assessment, and reading walkthroughs.
- **The Reading Gym:** curriculum training for foundational skills through grade-level success.

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Booth Mini-Sessions: Monday, Nov. 23

Stop by booth #68 for quick, standing sessions built for principals. Each one comes with a free tool to take back to your school.

Time	Session (10–15 minutes, standing)	Take-home
11:45 AM	**What to Look For in a 6–12 Reading Walkthrough** The look-fors that show whether students are really reading in every class	6–12 reading walkthrough tool
12:30 PM	**Ask Dr. French About Secondary Reading** Open Q&A. Bring your toughest questions about older struggling readers.	Bring your questions
1:30 PM	**Is Your Tier 1 Literacy Working? A 5-Question Check** Score your school in five minutes and find your biggest gap	Tier 1 literacy self-check
2:30 PM	**Your Initiative Audit in 10 Minutes** Find out what's really on teachers' plates, and what to stop	10-minute initiative audit tool

Can't make a session? Stop by booth #68 anytime for the free tools and a conversation.