

READING INSTRUCTION COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT® (RICA®)

CONTENT SPECIFICATIONS

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READING INSTRUCTION COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT® (RICA®) CONTENT SPECIFICATIONS

The goal of reading instruction is to develop competent, thoughtful readers who are able to use, interpret, and appreciate all types of text. Beginning teachers need to be able to deliver effective reading instruction that is based on the results of ongoing assessment; reflects knowledge of state and local reading standards for different grade levels; represents a balanced, comprehensive reading curriculum; and is sensitive to the needs of all students. The knowledge and abilities needed by beginning teachers are described below, organized into four domains. Competence in *all four* of the domains is critical and necessary for achieving the goals of reading instruction.

Domain I — Planning and Organizing Reading Instruction Based on Ongoing Assessment

Domain II — Developing Phonological and Other Linguistic Processes Related to Reading

Domain III — Developing Reading Comprehension and Promoting Independent Reading

Domain IV — Supporting Reading Through Oral and Written Language Development

Important Notes About the RICA Content Specifications

1. Each domain includes two or more content areas. The order of the content areas and the order of the competency statements within each content area do not indicate relative importance or value.
2. Many of the competencies include examples. The examples are not comprehensive. They are provided to help clarify the knowledge and abilities described in the competency.
3. The competencies pertain to the teaching of reading in English, even though many of the competencies may also be relevant to the teaching of reading in other languages.
4. Each competency refers to the provision of instruction to all students, including English language learners, speakers of non-mainstream English, and students with special needs. Instruction should be characterized by a sensitivity to and respect for the culture and language of the students, and should be based on students' developmental, linguistic, functional, and age-appropriate needs; that is, instruction should be provided in ways that meet the needs of the individual student.

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DOMAIN I: PLANNING AND ORGANIZING READING INSTRUCTION BASED ON ONGOING ASSESSMENT

CONTENT AREA 1: Conducting Ongoing Assessment of Reading Development

Ongoing assessment of reading development refers to the use of multiple measures and the ongoing analysis of individual, small-group, and class progress in order to plan effective instruction and, when necessary, classroom interventions. All instruction should be based on information acquired through valid assessment procedures. Students must be able to recognize their own reading strengths and needs and be able to apply strategies for increasing their own reading competence. Teachers must be able to use and interpret a variety of informal and formal assessment tools and communicate assessment data effectively to students, parents, guardians, school personnel, and others.

- 1.1 **Principles of assessment.** The beginning teacher knows how to collect and use assessment data from multiple measures on an ongoing basis to inform instructional decisions. The teacher is able to select and administer informal reading assessments in all areas of reading and to analyze the results of both informal and formal reading assessments to plan reading instruction.
- 1.2 **Assessing reading levels.** The beginning teacher is able to use a variety of informal measures to determine students' independent, instructional, and frustration levels of reading. The teacher conducts these assessments throughout the school year and uses the results to select materials and plan and implement effective instruction for individuals and small and large groups in all areas of reading.
- 1.3 **Using and communicating assessment results.** The beginning teacher knows what evidence demonstrates that a student is performing below, at, or above expected levels of performance based on content standards and applies this information when interpreting and using assessment results. The teacher is able to recognize when a student needs additional help in one or more areas of reading, plans and implements timely interventions to address identified needs, and recognizes when a student may need additional help beyond the classroom. The teacher is able to communicate assessment results and reading progress to students, parents, guardians, school personnel, and others.

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CONTENT AREA 2: Planning, Organizing, and Managing Reading Instruction

Planning, organizing, and managing reading instruction refer to teacher practices necessary for delivering an effective, balanced, comprehensive reading program. Students' reading development is supported by a well-planned and organized program that is based on content and performance standards in reading and responsive to the needs of individual students. Students must develop as proficient readers in order to become effective learners and take advantage of the many lifelong benefits of reading. Teachers need to understand how to plan, organize, manage, and differentiate instruction to support all students' reading development.

- 2.1 **Factors involved in planning reading instruction.** The beginning teacher is able to plan instruction based on state and local content and performance standards in reading. The teacher knows the components of a balanced, comprehensive reading program (see Content Areas 1 and 3 through 13) and the interrelationships among these components. The teacher is able to do short- and long-term planning in reading and develop reading lessons that reflect knowledge of the standards and understanding of a balanced, comprehensive reading program. The teacher reflects on his or her reading instruction and uses this and other professional development resources and activities to plan effective reading instruction.
- 2.2 **Organizing and managing reading instruction.** The beginning teacher understands that the goal of reading instruction is to develop reading competence in all students, including English language learners, speakers of non-mainstream English, and students with special needs, and the teacher knows how to manage, organize, and differentiate instruction in all areas of reading to accomplish this goal (e.g., by using flexible grouping, individualizing reading instruction, planning and implementing timely interventions, and providing differentiated and/or individualized instruction). The teacher knows how to select and use instructional materials and create a learning environment that promotes student reading (e.g., by organizing independent and instructional reading materials and effectively managing their use, by taking advantage of resources and equipment within the school and the larger educational community).

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**DOMAIN II: DEVELOPING PHONOLOGICAL AND OTHER LINGUISTIC PROCESSES
RELATED TO READING**

CONTENT AREA 3: Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the conscious awareness that words are made up of individual speech sounds (phonemes), and it is strongly related to reading achievement. To become effective readers, students must be able to perceive and produce the specific sounds of the English language and understand how the sound system works. Therefore, teachers must understand how and why phonemic awareness skills develop both before students are reading and as they are learning to read. Teachers need to know how to plan implicit and systematic, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and how to choose a variety of materials and activities that provide clear examples for the identification, comparison, blending, substitution, deletion, and segmentation of sounds. Teachers need to analyze students' spoken language development in order to match instruction with the students' needs.

- 3.1 **Assessing phonemic awareness.** The beginning teacher knows how to assess students' auditory awareness, discrimination of sounds, and spoken language for the purpose of planning instruction in phonemic awareness that meets students' needs.
- 3.2 **The role of phonemic awareness.** The beginning teacher knows ways in which phonemic awareness is related to reading achievement both before students are reading and as they are learning to read. The teacher understands the instructional progression for helping students acquire phonemic awareness skills (i.e., words, syllables, onsets and rimes, and phonemes).
- 3.3 **Developing phonemic awareness.** The beginning teacher is able to promote students' understanding that words are made up of sounds. The teacher knows how to achieve this goal by delivering appropriate, motivating instruction, both implicitly and explicitly, in auditory awareness and discrimination of sounds, phoneme awareness (e.g., teaching students how to rhyme, blend, substitute, segment, and delete sounds in words), and word awareness (i.e., recognition of word boundaries). The teacher is able to select materials and activities for teaching phonemic awareness skills that are appropriate for students at different stages of reading development.

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CONTENT AREA 4: Concepts About Print

Concepts about print refer to an understanding of how letters, words, and sentences are represented in written language, and these concepts play a critical role in students' learning to read. Students need to understand that ideas can be represented in print forms and that print forms may have unique characteristics that differ from oral representations of those same ideas. Teachers need to know that if a student does not demonstrate understanding of concepts about print and the written language system, then these concepts must be explicitly taught.

- 4.1 **Assessing concepts about print.** The beginning teacher is able to assess students' understanding of concepts about print and knows how to use assessment results to plan appropriate instruction in this area.
- 4.2 **Concepts about print.** The beginning teacher knows the instructional progression of concepts about print (e.g., sentence, word, and letter representation; directionality; tracking of print; understanding that print carries meaning). The teacher is able to select appropriate materials and activities and to provide effective instruction in these concepts.
- 4.3 **Letter recognition.** The beginning teacher knows the importance of teaching upper- and lower-case letter recognition and is able to select, design, and use engaging materials and activities, including multisensory techniques (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile), to help students recognize letter shapes and learn the names of letters.

CONTENT AREA 5: Systematic, Explicit Phonics and Other Word Identification Strategies

Systematic, explicit phonics and other word identification strategies refer to an organized program in which letter-sound correspondences for letters and letter clusters are taught directly in a manner that gradually builds from basic elements to more complex patterns. Word identification strategies build on phoneme awareness and concepts about print. Skillful and strategic word identification plays a critical role in rapid, accurate decoding; reading fluency; and comprehension. Students must understand the alphabetic principle and conventions of written language so that they are able to apply these skills automatically when reading. Teachers must provide systematic, explicit instruction in phonics and other word identification strategies.

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- 5.1 **Assessing phonics and other word identification strategies.** The beginning teacher is able to select and use a variety of appropriate informal and formal assessments to determine students' knowledge of and skills in applying phonics and other word identification strategies, including decoding tests, fluency checks (rate and accuracy), and sight word checks. The teacher is able to use this information to plan appropriate instruction.
- 5.2 **Explicit phonics instruction.** The beginning teacher knows that rapid, automatic decoding contributes to reading fluency and comprehension. The teacher is able to plan and implement systematic, explicit phonics instruction that is sequenced according to the increasing complexity of linguistic units. These units include phonemes, onsets and rimes, letters, letter combinations, syllables, and morphemes. The teacher is able to select published and teacher-developed instructional programs, materials, and activities that will be effective in the systematic, explicit teaching of phonics.
- 5.3 **Developing fluency.** The beginning teacher knows how to help students develop fluency and consolidate their word identification strategies through frequent opportunities to read and reread decodable texts and other texts written at their independent reading levels. The teacher is able to select appropriate texts for supporting students' development of reading fluency.
- 5.4 **Word identification strategies.** The beginning teacher is able to model and explicitly teach students to use word identification strategies in reading for meaning, including graphophonic cues, syllable division, and morphology (e.g., use of affixes and roots), and to use context cues (semantic and syntactic) to resolve ambiguity. The teacher is able to select materials for teaching decoding and word identification strategies and knows how to model self-correction strategies and provide positive, explicit, corrective feedback for word identification errors.
- 5.5 **Sight words.** The beginning teacher is able to provide opportunities for mastery of common, irregular sight words through multiple and varied reading and writing experiences. The teacher is able to select materials and activities to develop and reinforce students' knowledge of sight words.
- 5.6 **Terminology.** The beginning teacher knows the terminology and concepts of decoding and other word identification strategies (e.g., consonant blends, consonant digraphs, vowel patterns, syllable patterns, orthography, morphology), and knows how phonemes, onsets and rimes, syllables, and morphemes are represented in print.

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CONTENT AREA 6: Spelling Instruction

Spelling maps sounds to print. Spelling knowledge and word identification skills are strongly related. Students' knowledge of orthographic (spelling) patterns contributes to their word recognition, vocabulary development, and written expression. Teachers need to know the stages of spelling and be able to provide meaningful spelling instruction that includes systematic, explicit teaching of orthographic patterns (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, syllable patterns), morphology, etymology, and high-frequency words.

- 6.1 **Assessing spelling.** The beginning teacher is able to analyze and interpret students' spelling to assess their stages of spelling development (pre-phonetic, phonetic, transitional, conventional) and to use that information to plan appropriate spelling instruction.

- 6.2 **Systematic spelling instruction.** The beginning teacher is able to use a systematic plan for spelling instruction that relates to students' stages of spelling development. The teacher knows how to select spelling words and use deliberate, multisensory techniques to teach and reinforce spelling patterns. The teacher knows how the etymology and morphology of words relate to orthographic patterns in English, knows high-frequency words that do and do not conform to regular spelling patterns, and is able to utilize this knowledge in planning and implementing systematic spelling instruction.

- 6.3 **Spelling instruction in context.** The beginning teacher knows how to teach spelling in context and provides students with opportunities to apply and assess their spelling skills across the curriculum. The teacher knows how to plan spelling instruction that supports students' reading development (e.g., phonics skills, knowledge of morphology, vocabulary development) and writing development (e.g., use of decoding skills as a strategy for proofreading their spelling). The teacher is able to identify spelling words that support and reinforce instruction in these areas.

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**DOMAIN III: DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION AND PROMOTING
INDEPENDENT READING**

CONTENT AREA 7: Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to reading with understanding. Reading fluency and reading comprehension are necessary for learning in all content areas, sustaining interest in what is read, and deriving pleasure from reading. The end goal of reading instruction is to enable students to read with understanding and apply comprehension strategies to different types of texts for a variety of lifetime reading purposes. Effective readers produce evidence of comprehension by clarifying the ideas presented in text and connecting them to other sources, including their own background knowledge. Teachers need to be able to facilitate students' comprehension and provide them with explicit instruction and guided practice in comprehension strategies.

- 7.1 **Assessing reading comprehension.** The beginning teacher is able to use informal and formal procedures to assess students' comprehension of narrative and expository texts and their use of comprehension strategies. The teacher knows how to use this information to provide effective instruction in reading comprehension.
- 7.2 **Fluency and other factors affecting comprehension.** The beginning teacher understands factors affecting reading comprehension (e.g., reading rate and fluency, word recognition, prior knowledge and experiences, vocabulary) and knows how proficient readers read. The teacher is able to use this knowledge to plan and deliver effective instruction in reading comprehension.
- 7.3 **Facilitating comprehension.** The beginning teacher is able to facilitate comprehension at various stages of students' reading development (e.g., before students learn to read, as they are learning to read, and as they become proficient readers). The teacher is able to select and use a range of activities and strategies before, during, and after reading to enhance students' comprehension (e.g., developing background knowledge, encouraging predictions, questioning, conducting discussions).

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- 7.4 **Different levels of comprehension.** The beginning teacher knows the levels of comprehension and is able to model and explicitly teach comprehension skills. These include (a) literal comprehension skills (e.g., identifying explicitly stated main ideas, details, sequence, cause-effect relationships, and patterns); (b) inferential comprehension skills (e.g., inferring main ideas, details, comparisons, cause-effect relationships not explicitly stated; drawing conclusions or generalizations from a text; predicting outcomes); and (c) evaluative comprehension skills (e.g., recognizing instances of bias and unsupported inferences in texts; detecting propaganda and faulty reasoning; distinguishing between facts and opinions; reacting to a text's content, characters, and use of language). The teacher is able to select materials (both narrative and expository texts) to support effective instruction in these areas.
- 7.5 **Comprehension strategies.** The beginning teacher is able to model and explicitly teach a range of strategies students can use to clarify the meaning of text (e.g., self-monitoring, rereading, note taking, outlining, summarizing, mapping, using learning logs). The teacher knows how to select materials and create opportunities for guided and independent practice using comprehension strategies.

CONTENT AREA 8: Literary Response and Analysis

Literary response and analysis refer to a process in which students extend their understanding and appreciation of significant literary works representing a wide range of genres, perspectives, eras, and cultures. Literature provides readers with unique opportunities to reflect on their own experiences, investigate further ranges of human experience, gain access to unfamiliar worlds, and develop their own imaginative capacities. Students who are fully engaged in literature find a rich medium in which to explore language. Teachers need to provide explicit instruction and guided practice in responding to literature and analyzing literary text structures and elements.

- 8.1 **Assessing literary response and analysis.** The beginning teacher is able to assess students' responses to literature (e.g., making personal connections, analyzing text, providing evidence from text to support their responses) and use that information to plan appropriate instruction in these areas.

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- 8.2 **Responding to literature.** The beginning teacher is able to select literature from a range of eras, perspectives, and cultures and provides students with frequent opportunities to listen to and read high-quality literature for different purposes. The teacher knows how to use a range of instructional approaches and activities for helping students apply comprehension strategies when reading literature and for developing students' responses to literature (e.g., using guided reading, reading logs, and discussions about literature; encouraging students to connect elements in a text to other sources, including other texts, their experiences, and their background knowledge).
- 8.3 **Literary analysis.** The beginning teacher knows and can teach elements of literary analysis and criticism (e.g., describing and analyzing story elements, recognizing features of different literary genres, determining mood and theme, analyzing the use of figurative language, analyzing ways in which a literary work reflects the traditions and perspectives of a particular people or time period). The teacher is able to select literature that provides clear examples of these elements and that matches students' instructional needs and reading interests.

CONTENT AREA 9: Content-Area Literacy

Content-area literacy refers to the ability to learn through reading. Learning in all content areas is supported by strong reading comprehension strategies and study skills. Students need to know how to apply a variety of reading comprehension strategies to different types of texts, analyze the structures and features of expository (informational) texts, and select and vary their reading strategies for different texts and purposes. Teachers need to model and provide explicit instruction in these skills and strategies and provide students with frequent opportunities for guided and independent practice using them.

- 9.1 **Assessing content-area literacy.** The beginning teacher is able to assess students' comprehension in content-area reading and use that information to provide effective instruction.

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- 9.2 **Different types of texts and purposes for reading.** The beginning teacher knows and is able to teach students about different types and functions of text and the skills and strategies required for reading and comprehending different types of texts. The teacher is able to select texts that provide clear examples of common text structures (i.e., cause/effect, comparison/contrast, problem/solution) and knows how to model and explicitly teach students to use text structures to improve their comprehension and memory of expository texts. The teacher is able to model and teach reading strategies for different reading purposes (e.g., skimming, scanning, in-depth reading).
- 9.3 **Study skills.** The beginning teacher is able to model and explicitly teach study skills for locating and retrieving information from reference materials and content-area texts, for retaining and using information, and for test taking.

CONTENT AREA 10: Student Independent Reading

Independent reading plays a critical role in promoting students' familiarity with language patterns, increasing fluency and vocabulary, broadening knowledge in content areas, and motivating further reading for information and pleasure. Independent reading improves reading performance. To become effective readers, students should be encouraged to read as frequently, broadly, and thoughtfully as possible. Teachers need to understand the importance of independent reading and know how to encourage and guide students in their independent reading.

- 10.1 **Encouraging independent reading.** The beginning teacher is able to determine each student's reading interests and preferences, survey the quantity and quality of students' reading, consider each student's independent reading level, and use that information to promote extensive independent reading. The teacher promotes student reading that extends beyond the core curriculum by providing daily opportunities for self-selected reading and frequent opportunities for sharing what is read. The teacher knows how to guide students in selecting independent reading materials and how to motivate students to read independently by regularly reading aloud to students from high-quality texts, providing access to a variety of reading materials, and suggesting texts that match student interests.

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- 10.2 **Supporting at-home reading.** The beginning teacher is able to use a variety of strategies to motivate students to read at home. The teacher encourages and provides support for parents or guardians to read to their children, in English and/or in the primary languages of English language learners, and/or to use additional strategies to promote literacy in the home. The teacher is able to select and organize, for various purposes, a range of reading materials at different levels in English and, when available, in the primary language(s) of the students in the classroom.

DOMAIN IV: SUPPORTING READING THROUGH ORAL AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

CONTENT AREA 11: Relationships Among Reading, Writing, and Oral Language

An effective, comprehensive language arts program increases students' language facility through relevant daily opportunities to relate listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Reading is supported by effective writing, listening, and speaking instruction, and the goal of language arts instruction is to fully develop students' communication skills. Students must be able to connect reading, writing, listening, and speaking tasks to their experiences, intentions, and purposes. Teachers need to be aware of the interdependent nature of reading, writing, listening, and speaking and be able to use interrelated instruction in the four areas to promote reading proficiency.

- 11.1 **Assessing oral and written language.** The beginning teacher is able to informally assess students' oral and written language and use that information when planning reading instruction.
- 11.2 **Oral language development.** The beginning teacher knows how to provide formal and informal oral language opportunities across the curriculum that enhance students' development as readers (e.g., through language play, group discussions, questioning, and sharing information). The teacher helps students make connections between their oral language and reading and writing.
- 11.3 **Written language development.** The beginning teacher is able to provide purposeful writing opportunities across the curriculum to enhance students' reading development. The teacher explicitly teaches the transfer of skills from oral language to written language. The teacher provides instruction in which reading, writing, and oral language are interrelated.

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- 11.4 **Supporting English language learners.** The beginning teacher is able to interrelate the elements of language arts instruction to support the reading development of English language learners (e.g., using preview-review, visual aids, charts, real objects, word organizers, graphic organizers, and outlining). The teacher knows general ways in which the writing systems of other languages may differ from English (e.g., that not all writing systems are alphabetic, that English is less regular phonetically than some other alphabetic languages). The teacher understands factors and processes involved in transferring literacy competencies from one language to another (e.g., positive and negative transfer) and uses knowledge of language similarities and differences to promote transfer of language skills (e.g., through scaffolding strategies, modeling, and explicit instruction).

CONTENT AREA 12: Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary constitutes the building blocks of language. Vocabulary knowledge plays a critical role in reading comprehension, and readers learn most vocabulary through wide reading. Students need to know how to use a range of strategies, including those involving word analysis, context, and syntax, that promote reading fluency and enable independent comprehension, interpretation, and application of words contained in narrative and expository text. Upon entering school, students have a listening and speaking vocabulary that forms the foundation for vocabulary and comprehension instruction. Teachers need to build upon this foundation by providing explicit instruction in vocabulary development and in determining the meaning and accurate use of unfamiliar words encountered through listening and reading.

- 12.1 **Assessing vocabulary knowledge.** The beginning teacher is able to informally assess students' vocabulary knowledge in relation to specific reading needs and texts and is able to use that information to plan appropriate vocabulary instruction.
- 12.2 **Increasing vocabulary knowledge.** The beginning teacher knows how to provide opportunities for students to increase their vocabulary by listening to and reading a variety of texts and encourages students to apply their vocabulary knowledge in new contexts. The teacher is able to select vocabulary words on the basis of appropriate criteria (e.g., words that are related to each other, words needed to comprehend a reading selection). The teacher knows how to select appropriate instructional materials (e.g., read-aloud materials that promote vocabulary development and lay the foundation for complex language structures) and is able to teach vocabulary using a range of instructional activities (e.g., word sorts, word banks, classification, semantic mapping).

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- 12.3 **Strategies for gaining and extending meanings of words.** The beginning teacher is able to model and explicitly teach students a variety of strategies for gaining meaning from unfamiliar words, such as using word analysis (e.g., decoding, prefixes and suffixes, base words, roots), context, and syntax. The teacher knows how to select and use materials and activities that help students extend their understanding of words, including words with multiple meanings. The teacher is able to provide instruction in the use of reference materials that can help clarify the meaning of words (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus, glossary, technological sources).

CONTENT AREA 13: Structure of the English Language

Structure of the English language refers to established rules for the use of the language. Students' knowledge of the structure of English promotes their reading fluency, listening and reading comprehension, and oral and written expression. Students must be able to recognize, when listening or reading, and apply, when speaking or writing, English language conventions and structures. Teachers need a basic knowledge of English conventions and the structure of the English language (sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, syntax, and semantics) and must be able to provide instruction in these areas to enhance students' literacy skills.

- 13.1 **Assessing English language structures.** The beginning teacher is able to analyze students' oral and written language to determine their understanding and use of English language structures and conventions and knows how to use this information to plan appropriate instruction.
- 13.2 **Differences between written and oral English.** The beginning teacher is able to help students understand similarities and differences between language structures used in spoken and written English. The teacher knows how to use explicit instruction and guided practice to teach written-language structures to all students. The teacher uses a range of approaches and activities to develop students' facility in comprehending and using academic language (e.g., oral language development activities to build knowledge of academic language and familiarize students with grammatical structures they will encounter in written text).

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- 13.3 **Applying knowledge of the English language to improve reading.**
The beginning teacher has a basic knowledge of English syntax and semantics and is able to use this knowledge to improve students' reading competence (e.g., by teaching students to group words into meaningful phrases to increase reading fluency and comprehension, by teaching students to analyze how punctuation affects a text's meaning). The beginning teacher knows how to help students interpret and apply English grammar and language conventions in authentic reading, writing, listening, and speaking contexts. The teacher is able to help students consolidate their knowledge of English grammar and improve their reading fluency and comprehension by providing frequent opportunities to listen to, read, and reread materials that provide clear examples of specific English grammatical structures and conventions.