IMPROVING LITERACY IN KEY STAGE 2
Guidance Report

Education
Endowment
Foundation

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L **LITERACY**

This guidance report is one of several resources that the EEF has produced on the theme of literacy.

For more on literacy from the EEF please visit:

https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence/school-themes/literacy/

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FOREWORD

Good literacy skills provide us with the building blocks not just for academic success, but for fulfilling careers and rewarding lives. Yet despite our best efforts, a disadvantaged child in England is still more than twice as likely as their classmates from more advantaged homes to leave primary school without reaching the expected levels in reading and writing.

At the Education Endowment Foundation, we believe the best way to break this link between family income and educational attainment is through better use of evidence: looking at what has—and has not—worked in the past can put us in a much better place to judge what is likely to work in the future.

But it can be difficult to know where to start. There are thousands of studies of primary literacy teaching out there, most of which are presented in academic papers and journals. Teachers are inundated with information about programmes and training courses, all of which make claims about impact. How can anyone know which findings are the most secure, reliable, and relevant to their school and pupils?

This is why we've produced this guidance report. It offers seven practical evidence-based recommendations—that are relevant to all pupils, but particularly to those struggling with their literacy. To develop the recommendations we reviewed the best available international research and consulted experts to arrive at key principles for effective literacy teaching.

This report is part of a series providing guidance on literacy teaching. It builds on the recommendations presented in our Improving Literacy in Key Stage One report, but is specific to the needs of pupils at Key Stage 2. At Key Stage 2, pupils are consolidating their literacy skills, building their vocabulary and developing their fluency and confidence as speakers, writers and readers of language. While many of the strategies and examples presented in this report are similar to those in the Key Stage 1 guidance report, they are often more complex and multi-staged, reflecting the increasing depth and breadth of pupils' knowledge and skills. Pupils will be using strategies with increasing independence and sophistication, and will increasingly be able to combine them.

I hope this booklet will help to support a consistently excellent, evidence-informed primary system in England that creates great opportunities for all children, regardless of their family background.

Sir Kevan Collins

Chief Executive
Education Endowment Foundation

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) guidance report contains seven recommendations regarding the teaching of literacy to pupils aged between 7 and 11.

The recommendations are arranged in five groups relating to:

 speaking and listening;

 reading;

 writing;

 assessment and diagnosis; and

 targeted interventions.

For each recommendation, we have provided a statement regarding the strength of the evidence underpinning that recommendation, and an 'evidence summary' box that describes the supporting evidence. This statement was selected from a series of five possible options, of decreasing strength. The statements range from 'very extensive' to 'very limited'. More information about the process used to create these statements is available in the 'How was this guidance compiled?' section of the report on page 23.

Overleaf is a summary of the recommendations.

1
Develop pupils' language capability to support their reading and writing

Purposeful speaking and listening activities support the development of pupils' language capability and provides a foundation for thinking and communication.

Purposeful activities include:

- reading books aloud and discussing them;
- activities that extend pupils' expressive and receptive vocabulary;
- collaborative learning activities where pupils can share their thought processes;
- structured questioning to develop reading comprehension;
- teachers modelling inference-making by thinking aloud; and
- pupils articulating their ideas verbally before they start writing.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH

VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

2
Support pupils to develop fluent reading capabilities

Fluent readers can read quickly, accurately, and with appropriate stress and intonation.

Fluent reading supports comprehension because pupils' cognitive resources are freed from focusing on word recognition and can be redirected towards comprehending the text.

This can be developed through:

- guided oral reading instruction—teachers model fluent reading of a text, then pupils read the same text aloud with appropriate feedback; and
- repeated reading—pupils re-read a short and meaningul passage a set number of times or until they reach a suitable level of fluency.

It is important to understand pupils' current capabilities and teach accordingly. Most pupils will need an emphasis on developing reading fluency, but some pupils may need a focus on more basic skills, such as decoding and phonological awareness.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH

VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

3
Teach reading comprehension strategies through modelling and supported practice

Reading comprehension can be improved by teaching specific strategies that pupils can apply both to monitor and overcome barriers to comprehension. These include:

- prediction;
- questioning;
- clarifying;
- summarising;
- inference; and
- activating prior knowledge.

The potential impact of these strategies is very high, but can be hard to achieve, since pupils are required to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

The strategies should be described and modelled before pupils practise the strategies with feedback. Support should then be gradually reduced as pupils take increasing responsibility.

Texts should be carefully selected to support the teaching of these strategies.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH

VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

4
Teach writing composition strategies through modelling and supported practice

Purpose and audience are central to effective writing. Pupils need to have a reason to write and someone to write for.

Writing can be thought of as a process made up of seven components:

- planning;
- drafting;
- sharing;
- evaluating;
- revising;
- editing; and
- publishing.

Effective writers use a number of strategies to support each component of the writing process. Pupils should learn how, when, and why to use each strategy. For example, pupils' planning could be improved by teaching the strategies of goalsetting and activating prior knowledge.

The strategies should be described and modelled before pupils practise them with feedback. Support should then be gradually reduced as pupils take increasing responsibility.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH

VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

5
Develop pupils' transcription and sentence construction skills through extensive practice

A fluent writing style supports composition because pupils' cognitive resources are freed from focusing on handwriting, spelling, and sentence construction and can be redirected towards writing composition.

Extensive practice, supported by effective feedback, is required to develop fluent transcription skills.

Spelling should be explicitly taught and diagnostic assessment should be used to focus effort on the spellings that pupils are finding difficult.

Pupils should practise sentence-combining and other sentence construction techniques.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH

VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

6
Target teaching and support by accurately assessing pupil needs

High-quality assessment and diagnosis should be used to target and adapt teaching to pupils' needs.

Rapid provision of support is important, but it is critical to ensure it is the right support. Diagnostic assessment can be used to inform professional judgement about the best next steps. Diagnostic assessment makes teaching more efficient by ensuring that effort is not wasted on rehearsing skills or content that a pupil already knows well.

A range of diagnostic assessments are available and staff should be trained to use and interpret these effectively.

This approach can be used for high- and low-attaining pupils and for whole-class and targeted interventions.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH

VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

7
Use high-quality structured interventions to help pupils who are struggling with their literacy

Schools should focus first on developing core classroom teaching strategies that improve the literacy capabilities of the whole class. With this in place, the need for additional support should decrease. Nevertheless, it is likely that a small number of pupils will require additional support.

There is a strong and consistent body of evidence demonstrating the benefit of structured interventions for pupils who are struggling with their literacy. The first step should be to use accurate diagnosis of capabilities and difficulties to match pupils to appropriate interventions.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH

VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

WHAT DOES THIS GUIDANCE COVER?

This is part of a series of reports that the EEF is producing on the theme of literacy. It focuses on the teaching of literacy to pupils between the ages of 7 and 11. However, it may also be applicable to older pupils who have fallen behind their peers, or younger pupils who are making rapid progress. An earlier report covers the typical requirements of teaching literacy in Key Stage 1 (ages 5–7) and a report published later in 2017 will cover the typical requirements of teaching literacy in the early years (ages 3–5).

This report is not intended to provide a comprehensive guide to literacy provision in primary schools. The recommendations represent 'lever points' where there is useful evidence about literacy teaching that schools can use to make a significant difference to pupils' learning. The report focuses on pedagogy and approaches that are supported by good evidence; it does not cover all of the potential components of successful literacy provision. Some will be missing because they are related to organisational or leadership issues; other areas are not covered because there is insufficient evidence to create an actionable recommendation in which we have confidence. Other important issues to consider include—but are not limited to—leadership, staff deployment and development, parental engagement, and resources.

This guidance draws predominately on studies that feed into the Teaching and Learning Toolkit produced by the EEF in collaboration with the Sutton Trust and Durham University. As such, it is not a new study in itself, but rather is intended as an accessible overview of existing research with clear, actionable guidance. More information about how this guidance was created is available at the end of the report.

WHO IS THIS GUIDANCE FOR?

This guidance is aimed primarily at literacy coordinators, headteachers, and other staff with leadership responsibility in primary schools. Senior leaders have responsibility for managing change across a school so attempts to implement these recommendations are more likely to be successful if they are involved. Classroom teachers will also find this guidance useful as a resource to aid their day-to-day literacy teaching.

It may also be used by:

- governors and parents to support and challenge school staff;
- programme developers to create more effective interventions and teacher training; and
- educational researchers to conduct further testing of the recommendations in this guidance, and fill in any gaps in the evidence.

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE FOR USING THIS GUIDANCE?

We recognise that the effective implementation of these recommendations—such that they make a real impact on children—is both critical and challenging. Therefore, the EEF is collaborating with a range of organisations across England to support schools to use the guidance.

- **North East Primary Literacy Campaign**. In November 2015, the EEF and Northern Rock Foundation launched a £10 million campaign to improve primary literacy outcomes for disadvantaged children in the North East. This five-year campaign aims to work with all 880 primary schools in the region, building on the excellent practice that already exists. The series of literacy guidance reports forms the foundation for this campaign. The EEF is collaborating with a range of organisations in the North East, who will contribute their expertise and build on their trusted local relationships to 'bring the evidence to life' in the classroom. More information about the campaign, and how to get involved, can be found at https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/north-east-literacy-campaign

- **Research Schools**. In October 2016, the EEF and the Institute of Effective Education launched the first five members of a growing national network of Research Schools. Research Schools will become a focal point for evidence-based practice in their region, building affiliations with large numbers of schools and supporting the use of evidence at scale. More information about the Research Schools Network, and how they can provide support on the use of EEF guidance reports, can be found at https://researchschool.org.uk

DEVELOP PUPILS' LANGUAGE CAPABILITY TO SUPPORT THEIR READING AND WRITING

Speaking and listening are at the heart of language, not only as foundations for reading and writing, but also as essential skills for thinking and communication.[1] Teaching should focus on pupils' language development, particularly their expressive language, which will also support their writing. Speaking and listening can be used to model and develop expressive and receptive language:

- articulating ideas before writing means pupils are not hindered by handwriting and spelling skills; and
- listening activities can develop inference skills without the need to process the written text.

Reading to pupils and discussing books is still important for this age group. Exposing pupils to an increasingly wide range of texts, with an appropriate level of challenge, will develop their language capability. This should include active engagement with a wide range of genres and media, including digital texts. This variation is likely to be motivating and engaging and it provides an opportunity to explicitly teach the features and structures of different types of text, which can develop more advanced comprehension and reasoning skills.[2]

Speaking and listening are critical to extending pupils' receptive and expressive vocabulary. While pupils may have the decoding skills required to say a word out loud, they will only be able to understand what it means if it is already in their vocabulary. Approaches to develop vocabulary can be split into two groups: (1) explicit teaching of new vocabulary and (2) exposure to a rich language environment with opportunities to hear and confidently experiment with new words. Both approaches should be used and the following points should be considered:[3]

- repeated exposure to new vocabulary is necessary across spoken language, reading and writing;
- pre-teaching and discussing new words can support reading comprehension;
- pupils should learn both new words and how to use familiar words in new contexts;
- vocabulary learning should entail active engagement in learning tasks; and
- digital technology can be used to help develop and teach vocabulary.

Teaching pupils to use morphemes (root words, prefixes and suffixes) can develop their vocabulary while also improving phonological awareness, decoding, and spelling.[4] The National Curriculum provides lists of words that pupils must learn to spell at Year 3–4 and Year 5–6.[5] Virtually all of these words can be modified by using morphemes, so if pupils learn the 100 words in the Year 5–6 list they should be able to read, spell, and understand several hundred words, as well as having developed an understanding of word-building, which they can apply to other vocabulary.

BOX 1: COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The impact of collaborative approaches on learning is consistently positive, but it does vary so it is important to get the detail right.[6] Effective collaborative learning requires much more than just sitting pupils together and asking them to collaborate; structured approaches with well-designed tasks lead to the greatest learning gains. Effective collaboration does not happen automatically so pupils will need support and practice. Approaches that promote talk and interaction between learners tend to result in the best gains. The following should be considered when using a collaborative learning approach:

- Tasks need to be designed carefully so that working together is effective and efficient, otherwise some pupils will try to work on their own.
- Competition between groups can be used to support pupils in working together more effectively within their group, though over-use of competition can focus learners on the competition rather than succeeding in their learning, so it must be used cautiously.
- It is particularly important to encourage lower achieving pupils to talk and articulate their thinking in collaborative tasks, as they may contribute less.
- Professional development may be needed to support the effective use of these strategies.

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

This recommendation is based on extensive evidence from nine meta-analyses that include studies of pupils aged 7-11. These studies examine a range of areas related to speaking and listening skills, and a range of outcomes including reading and writing.

SUPPORT PUPILS TO DEVELOP FLUENT READING CAPABILITIES

Scarborough's Reading Rope (figure 1) provides a useful model for reading by likening it to a rope comprised of multiple strands.[7] The two main strands, word recognition and language comprehension, are supported by a broad academic consensus and underpinned by research evidence.[8] These two main strands are composed of sub-strands that need to 'become entwined' as pupils learn to co-ordinate the different components of reading.

The model can be used as a diagnostic tool to identify areas to focus effort. Although all of the strands represent an important component of reading this does not mean that they require equal curriculum time. For example, most pupils will require a greater focus on their language capability (language structures and vocabulary) and reading fluency, but some will still need a focus on more basic skills, such as decoding. Therefore, it is important to understand pupils' current capabilities and focus effort appropriately.

Fluent readers can read quickly, accurately, and with appropriate stress and intonation. A fluent reading style supports comprehension because pupils' limited cognitive resources are freed from focusing on word recognition and can be redirected towards comprehending the text.[9] There are no quick ways to develop reading fluency and most pupils will benefit from being explicitly taught rather than just being encouraged to practise individually.[10] The following approaches are well supported by evidence:[11]
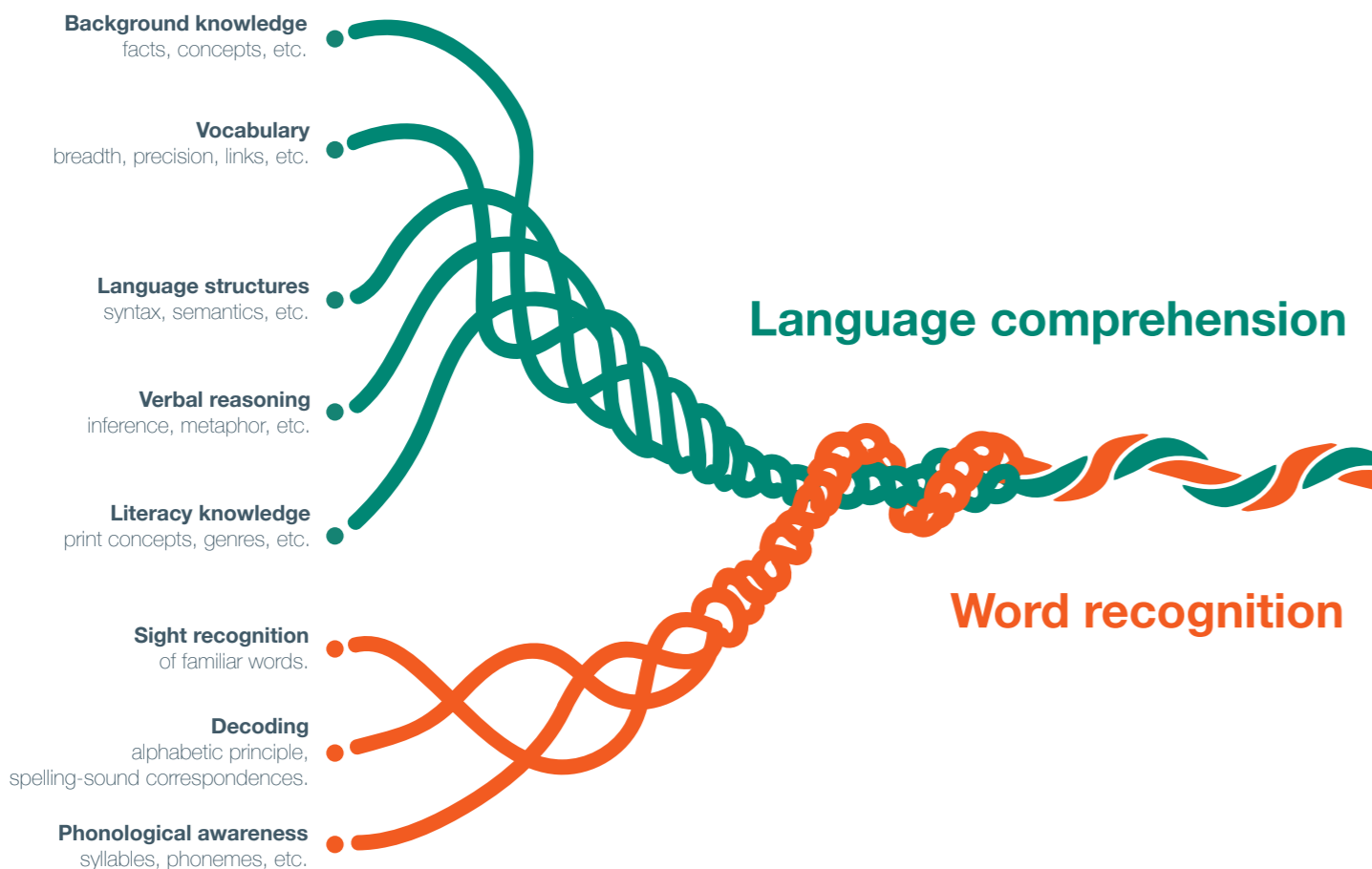
- **guided oral reading instruction**—fluent reading of a text is modelled by an adult or peer and pupils then read the same text aloud with appropriate feedback; and

- **repeated reading**—pupils re-read a short and meaningful passage a set number of times or until they reach a suitable level of fluency.

FIGURE 1: THE MANY STRANDS THAT ARE WOVEN INTO SKILLED READING[7]

Background knowledge
facts, concepts, etc.

Vocabulary
breadth, precision, links, etc.

Language structures
syntax, semantics, etc.

Verbal reasoning
inference, metaphor, etc.

Literacy knowledge
print concepts, genres, etc.

Language comprehension

Sight recognition
of familiar words.

Decoding
alphabetic principle,
spelling-sound correspondences.

Phonological awareness
syllables, phonemes, etc.

Word recognition

BOX 2: WORD RECOGNITION AT KS2

Actively teaching reading fluency is important for all pupils and those judged to be struggling are likely to benefit from targeted support. However, diagnosis of the specific issue should be the first step for any intervention. For example, it is important to rule out weaknesses in the individual strands (decoding and phonological awareness) before attempting to 'entwine' them by developing reading fluency. Fluency can be assessed by listening to pupils read from an appropriate text. Various rubrics, such as the Multidimensional Fluency Scale, can be used to inform accurate diagnosis.[12]

Pupils are likely to continue to benefit from some phonic work, especially focused on less common grapheme-phoneme correspondences. Pupils should have mastered the most common correspondences in KS1, but some may still need support and guidance in KS2.

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

The evidence for a balanced approach to reading is extensive, from both observational and experimental studies. There are 15 meta-analyses of different approaches to reading, but only one comparing long-term follow up effects. There is, however, limited evidence on the best way to combine approaches for different ages and capabilities to develop fluency. Overall the evidence is moderate.

VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

TEACH READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES THROUGH MODELLING AND SUPPORTED PRACTICE

Reading comprehension can be improved by teaching pupils specific strategies that they can apply both to monitor and overcome barriers to comprehension.[13] A number of different strategies exist and some overlap.[14] The following strategies should be modelled and practised to ensure they become embedded and fluent:[15]

- **Prediction**—pupils predict what might happen as a text is read. This causes them to pay close attention to the text, which means they can closely monitor their own comprehension.
- **Questioning**—pupils generate their own questions about a text in order to check their comprehension.
- **Clarifying**—pupils identify areas of uncertainty, which may be individual words or phrases, and seek information to clarify meaning.
- **Summarising**—pupils describe succinctly the meaning of sections of the text. This causes pupils to focus on the key content, which in turn supports comprehension monitoring. This can be attempted using graphic organisers that illustrate concepts and the relationships between them using diagrams.
- **Inference**—pupils infer the meaning of sentences from their context, and the meaning of words from spelling patterns.
- **Activating prior knowledge**—pupils think about what they already know about a topic, from reading or other experiences, and try to make links. This helps pupils to infer and elaborate, fill in missing or incomplete information and use existing mental structures to support recall.

The potential impact of these approaches is very high, but can be hard to achieve, since pupils are required to take greater responsibility for their own learning.[16] This requires them to learn three things: what the strategy is, how the strategy is used, and why and when to use the strategy.[17] Developing each of the strategies requires explicit instruction and extensive practice. Evidence-based collaborative activities and approaches, such as reciprocal teaching, which structure interaction with peers, are likely to be beneficial.[18] The gradual release of responsibility model describes how greater responsibility for using these strategies can be transferred to the pupil:[19]

1. an explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used;
2. modelling of the strategy in action by teachers and/or pupils;
3. collaborative use of the strategy in action;
4. guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility; and
5. independent use of the strategy.

These strategies can be introduced in isolation, but pupils should also be taught how to integrate combinations of strategies to develop effective comprehension of different texts. The effectiveness of teaching pupils to integrate multiple strategies is well supported by research evidence, and this approach is likely to be more effective than relying on single strategies in isolation.[20] Ultimately, the aim is for pupils themselves to take responsibility for automatically using these strategies to monitor and improve their reading comprehension.[21]

A key issue is selecting suitable texts in order to extend pupils' reading comprehension capabilities: too easy and pupils do not need to use the strategies, too hard and they cannot understand the text.[22] Teachers should read and carefully consider the challenges and opportunities presented by a text before using it. Important considerations include:

- **Opportunities**—does the text provide opportunities to use the strategy?
- **Vocabulary**—how suitable is the vocabulary?
- **Background knowledge**—what background knowledge will pupils need to understand the text?

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

Very extensive evidence from 8 meta-analyses has consistently demonstrated the impact of teaching metacognitive strategies for reading comprehension. Much of this research has been with pupils aged 7-11.

TEACH WRITING COMPOSITION STRATEGIES THROUGH MODELLING AND SUPPORTED PRACTICE

Writing can be thought of as a process made up of seven components. Pupils should be taught each of these components and underlying strategies. A strategy is a series of actions that writers use to achieve their goals and may support one or more components of the writing process. Strategies should be carefully modelled and practised. Over time, pupils should take increasing responsibility for selecting and using strategies.[23]

- **Planning**—setting goals and generating ideas before pupils begin writing. Pupils could write down goals so that they can refer back to them as they write. Example strategies: goal setting, activating prior knowledge, graphic organisers, and discussion.

- **Drafting**—focusing on noting down key ideas. Pupils should set out their writing in a logical order. Although accurate spelling, grammar and handwriting are important, at this stage they are not the main focus. Example strategies: making lists, graphic organisers, and writing frames.

- **Sharing**—sharing ideas or drafts throughout the writing process gives pupils feedback. Example strategy: in pairs, listen and read along as the author reads aloud.

- **Evaluating**—checking that the writing goals are being achieved throughout the process. This can be done by pupils as they re-read their writing or through feedback from adults or peers. Example strategies: self-monitoring and evaluation by asking questions like, 'Have I met my goals?' and 'Have I used appropriate vocabulary?'.

- **Revising**—making changes to the content of writing in light of feedback and self-evaluation. Where digital media are available this can be done easily and quickly. With pen and paper, it should be accepted that work may become messy but that at this stage the audience will be limited. Example strategies: peers placing a question mark next to things they do not understand and pupils thinking of synonyms for repeated words.

BOX 3: PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

Consideration of purpose and audience is vital for effective writing. Like adults, children need to have a reason to write and someone to write for. There are four main purposes of writing: to describe, to narrate, to inform, and to persuade.[27] Memorable experiences, such as trips out of the school or visitors to the school, can help to create a purpose for writing.[28] It is important that pupils learn to modify their writing according to the audience for whom they are writing, which includes selecting an appropriate form or genre.

Pupils need to learn the features and conventions of different genres. Exposure to a rich range of genres and identification of key features will support this. The purpose and audience of writing will influence the writing process—for example, writing that is intended to be published is likely to need a greater focus on revising and editing.

- **Editing**—making changes to ensure the text is accurate and coherent. At this stage, spelling and grammar assume greater importance and pupils will need to recognise that their work will need to be accurate if readers are to engage with it and extract the intended information from it. Example strategies: checking capital letters and full stops and reviewing spellings using a dictionary.

- **Publishing**—presenting the work so that others can read it. This may not be the outcome for all pieces of writing, but when used appropriately it can provide a strong incentive for pupils to produce high-quality writing and encourage them in particular to carefully revise and edit. Example strategies: displaying work, presenting to other classes, and sending copies to parents and carers.

Writing strategies should be explicitly taught using the 'gradual release of responsibility' model (see page 12).[24] This can be repeated for each strategy. However, pupils will inevitably learn the strategies at different rates so it is important to recognise that the model is not a linear process. For example, based on observations of pupils' guided practice it may be beneficial to provide repeated modelling emphasising different aspects of the strategy.

Teachers should introduce each strategy by describing how and when to use it. Then strategies should be modelled. Shared writing allows teachers to 'think-aloud' and share their thought process for each strategy with pupils. For example, teachers can model the revising process by posing questions to themselves:

- How could this be improved?
- Is some of the vocabulary and phrasing repetitive?
- Which synonyms could be used?

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

There is extensive evidence for the impact of teaching writing composition strategies from three meta-analyses.

5

DEVELOP PUPILS' TRANSCRIPTION AND SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION SKILLS THROUGH EXTENSIVE PRACTICE

It is important to promote the basic skills of writing—skills that need to become increasingly automatic so that pupils can concentrate on writing composition.[29] This includes the transcription skills of spelling and handwriting (or typing, where appropriate), as well as sentence construction.[30] If these skills are slow or effortful then this will hinder progress in writing composition. High-quality practice is essential to develop fluent transcription skills. Practice should be:[31]

- extensive—a large amount of regular practice is required for pupils to achieve fluency in these skills;

- motivating and engaging—achieving the necessary quantity of practice requires pupils to be motivated and fully engaged in improving their writing; and

- supported by effective feedback—with teachers providing feedback to help pupils focus their effort appropriately.

Sentence construction can be developed through activities like sentence-combining where simple sentences are combined so that varied and more complex multi-clause sentences are produced.[32] Initially, the teacher can model this, but pupils should go on to work collaboratively and independently. Pupils need to learn to construct increasingly sophisticated sentences, for meaning and effect, with speed.

Fast and accurate spelling of an extensive vocabulary is a key component of writing fluency. There is limited high-quality evidence about how to teach spelling, but it is clear that spelling should be actively taught rather than simply tested.[33] Phonics provides a foundation for effective spelling but it is not the only skill needed. By analysing the types of spelling errors pupils make it is possible to provide support specific to their needs (see figure 2).[34]

The teaching of spelling is likely to work best when related to the current content being studied in school and when teachers encourage pupils to use new spellings in their writing. Other promising approaches include the teaching and practising of word patterns, paired learning approaches, and the use of techniques such as 'look-say-cover-write-check'.[35]

FIGURE 2: TYPES OF SPELLING ERROR AND APPROPRIATE STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SPELLING

Phonological errors are not phonologically plausible, e.g. 'frist' for 'first' or 'gaj' for 'garage'.	Orthographical errors are phonologically plausible, but inaccurate, e.g. 'gud' for 'good' or 'carm' for 'calm'.	Morphological errors are due to a lack of awareness of morphemes, e.g. 'trapt' for 'trapped'; 'realshun' for 'relation'; 'ekscuse' for 'excuse'.
Strategies Explicit teaching of consonant and vowel phonemes. Practise sounding phonemes all the way through words. Focus on identification of common digraphs in words.	Strategies Look at patterns of letters and syllables within words. Encourage automatic recognition of whole words in conjunction with an emphasis on careful decoding and encoding.	Strategies Focus on prefixes, suffixes and root words and learn common rules. For example, most words ending in 'f' or 'fe' change their plurals to 'ves', e.g. 'half' to 'halves' and 'knife' to 'knives'. Explore the relationship between meaning and spelling by looking at etymology.

BOX 4: FEEDBACK AND MARKING

Feedback studies typically show very high effects on learning. However, they also have a very wide range of effects, with some studies showing a negative impact.[36] Therefore, it is important to consider carefully how feedback is given. Feedback can come from peers as well as adults and be can be verbal, written, or can be given through tests or via digital technology.

Marking is just one type of feedback, but it contributes significantly to teachers' workload.[37] Despite this, there is currently only limited evidence about the most cost-effective marking approaches.[38] A guiding principle might be to mark less, but to mark better. Consider the following characteristics of effective feedback:[39]

- be specific, accurate, and clear (for example, 'You have made good use of adjectives to describe the scene' rather than 'Your writing is getting better');

- compare what a pupil is doing right now with what they have done wrong before (for example, 'Your use of speech marks is much more accurate than before');

- encourage and support further effort by helping pupils identify things that are hard and require extra effort (for example, 'You need to put extra effort into your editing to improve your spelling');

- give feedback sparingly so that it is meaningful; and

- provide specific guidance on how to improve rather than just telling pupils when they are incorrect.

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

The evidence regarding physical writing skills is limited, and based on reviews and single studies. Fewer studies have been conducted regarding teaching transcription skills than other aspects of literacy. Evidence for sentence construction is more consistent and robust.

TARGET TEACHING AND SUPPORT BY ACCURATELY ASSESSING PUPIL NEEDS

As pupils develop their literacy skills, teaching should adapt to their changing needs. This makes teaching more efficient because effort is focused on the best next step. This approach can support both high- and low-attaining pupils by ensuring that the challenge and support that they receive is appropriate.

Once a teacher has identified a pupil's specific needs, teaching can be adapted by:

- **changing the focus**—targeting an aspect of literacy where a pupil needs more support, for example, another strand of the Reading Rope model; or

- **changing the approach**—for example, using the principles of scaffolding to provide the right level of support that fades as responsibility transfers to the pupil.[40]

Prompt identification of a pupil's specific literacy needs and provision of appropriate support are critical to ensuring sustained progress.[41] While a quick response is important, it is essential that the support offered is appropriate. For example, providing a student who has a very limited vocabulary with additional phonics support— no matter how prompt or high-quality the support provided is—will do little to improve their overall reading.

Once pupils are identified as struggling, the first step should be to accurately diagnose the specific issue(s) and then carefully plan how to support the pupil. This should be underpinned by high-quality assessments, which can be helpfully split into two stages: monitoring and diagnosis. Monitoring can identify pupils who are struggling (or making faster progress), whilst diagnosis identifies a pupil's specific capabilities and difficulties.[42]

A range of diagnostic assessments for literacy is available and staff should be trained to use and interpret these effectively.[43] However, the results of diagnostic assessments should be used to supplement, not replace, professional judgement about a pupil's current capabilities. This in turn should inform the next steps for teaching and sufficient time should be given for effective targeted planning.

Targeted planning can appear daunting when pupils appear to have weaknesses in many areas, but it is especially important to understand fully such pupils' specific literacy needs before planning support. This is also true for pupils with special educational needs who may have specific or complex needs. There is evidence to suggest that all aspects of reading can be improved, but it is important to get the targeting right.[44] For example, comprehension difficulties are sometimes, at least partly, due to an underlying oral language weakness.[45]

BOX 5: HOW CAN DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY BE USED TO IMPROVE LITERACY?

Digital technology can be a useful tool to improve attainment in literacy.[46] There is promising evidence that digital technology can improve pupils' writing—in particular when pupils are drafting, editing and revising.[47] Digital technology can also be used to support pupils to write more and to a higher standard.[48] However, technology is not a panacea and although on average it has positive effects the range is very wide. This suggests that how technology is used is critical.[49] The impact of technology can be maximised by considering the following:[50]

- **Clarify the rationale**—will pupils work more efficiently, more effectively, or more intensively?

- **Identify the role**—will it help pupils to access learning content, teachers, or peers? Will the technology provide feedback or will it support more effective feedback from others, or better self-management by learners themselves?

- **Better interaction**—technology should support collaboration between pupils or teachers should use it to support discussion, interaction, or feedback.

- **Training**—for teachers, this should ideally go beyond mere technical skills and focus on how to use the technology to improve pedagogy.

- **Supplement**—digital technology usually works best as a supplement rather than as a replacement to normal teaching. Consider what it will replace or how the activities will be additional.

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

This recommendation is supported by moderate evidence from several reviews and intervention studies where an accurate baseline test is given to ensure the intervention is appropriate.

VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

USE HIGH-QUALITY STRUCTURED INTERVENTIONS TO HELP PUPILS WHO ARE STRUGGLING WITH THEIR LITERACY

Schools should focus first on developing core classroom teaching strategies that improve the literacy capabilities of the whole class. With this in place, the need for additional support should decrease. Nevertheless, it is likely that a small number of pupils will require additional support—in the form of high-quality, structured, targeted interventions—to make progress.[51]

Regular monitoring can identify pupils who are struggling with their literacy. Diagnostic assessments should then be used to understand the specific nature of the pupil's difficulty in order to match them to an appropriate intervention or to plan targeted support.[52]

Many literacy programmes claim to be supported by evidence, but it can be challenging to assess these claims or make comparisons between different programmes. The following free online resources provide a good starting point for assessing claims by summarising the available evidence:

- the EEF's literacy theme – an overview of the EEF's work on literacy including all literacy trials;[53]

- the 'Evidence for Impact' (E4I) database – a summary of programmes available in the U.K.;[54] and

- 'What works for children and young people with literacy difficulties?' – an overview of the effectiveness of literacy intervention schemes.[55]

BOX 6: IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMMES

There is a consistent body of evidence demonstrating the benefits of using structured programmes for targeted interventions. Appraising the available evidence before selecting a programme is important, but it is critical first to understand your school's context. Research evidence indicates what was successful in various schools in the past so careful consideration is needed to determine if it is likely to work in your school.[57] Programmes are likely to have the greatest impact where they meet a specific need. For example, a programme designed to increase the amount that pupils read is most likely to be effective if pupils in your school do not currently read enough.

Faithful implementation is critical to the success of any programme and this is likely to be improved by careful piloting and training for staff. Once a programme has become established it is important to consider ongoing training needs for new and experienced members of staff. Monitoring and evaluation should be used to ensure that the programme is having the intended impact.[58]

As each of the summaries show, few programmes available in the U.K. currently have robust evidence of effectiveness. Therefore, consider carefully how well aligned a programme is to the recommendations in this report and if they have the following features common to effective targeted interventions:[56]

- brief (about 30 minutes) and regular (3–5 times per week) sessions that are maintained over a sustained period (6–12 weeks) and carefully timetabled to enable consistent delivery;

- extensive training (5–30 hours) from experienced trainers or teachers;

- structured supporting resources and/or lesson plans with clear objectives;

- assessments to identify appropriate pupils, guide areas for focus, and track pupil progress;

- tuition that is additional to, and explicitly linked with, normal lessons; and

- connections between the out-of-class (intervention) learning and classroom teaching.

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

There is extensive and consistent evidence from at least 6 meta-analyses and reviews, including studies involving pupils aged 7-11 of the impact of structured interventions and intensive one to one support.

BOX 7: WHO SHOULD DELIVER CATCH-UP INTERVENTIONS?

One to one instruction from qualified teachers and reading specialists is one of the most effective, but also one of the most expensive, interventions for struggling readers.[59] The cost may be justified if it makes a substantial difference to pupils at a critical point in their reading development and therefore reduces any later need for further intensive support.

The average impact of teaching assistants delivering structured interventions is less than that for interventions taught by experienced qualified teachers, although again research shows a consistent impact on attainment, typically equating to three or four additional months progress.[60] Crucially, these positive effects *only* occur when teaching assistants work in structured settings with high-quality support and training. When teaching assistants are deployed in more informal, unsupported instructional roles, they can impact *negatively* on pupils' learning outcomes.[61] In other words, what matters is not whether teaching assistants are delivering interventions, but *how* they are doing so. In this context, structured evidence-based programmes provide an excellent means of aiding high-quality delivery.
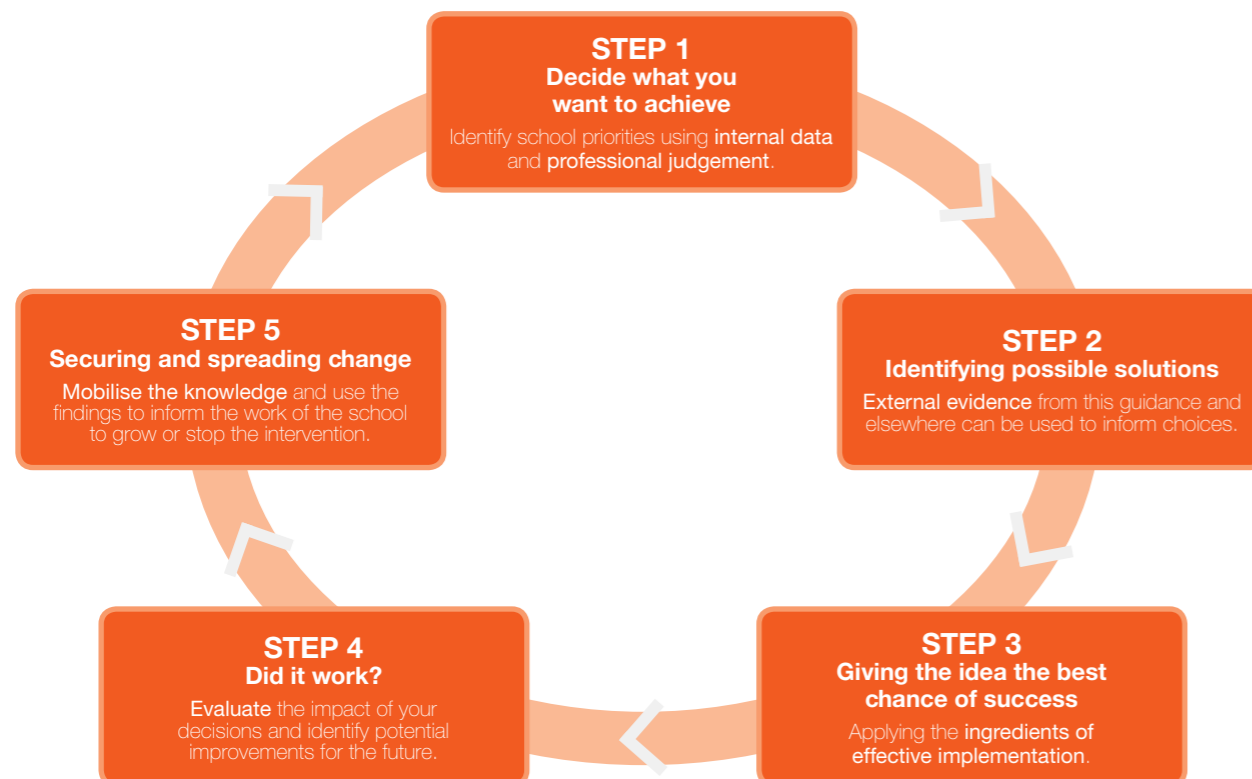
There are several key principles to consider when acting on this guidance.

1. These recommendations do not provide a 'one size fits all' solution. It is important to consider the delicate balance between implementing the recommendations faithfully and applying them appropriately to your school's particular context. Implementing the recommendations effectively will require careful consideration of how they fit your school's context and the application of sound professional judgement.

2. The recommendations should be considered together, as a group, and should not be implemented selectively. For example, although there is very extensive evidence for teaching reading comprehension strategies (recommendation 3), this is just one part of a broad and balanced approach to teaching reading (recommendation 2).

3. It is important to consider the precise detail provided beneath the headline recommendations. For example, schools should not use recommendation 7 to justify the purchase of lots of interventions. Rather, it should provoke thought about the most appropriate interventions to buy.

Inevitably, change takes time, and we recommend taking at least two terms to plan, develop, and pilot strategies on a small scale before rolling out new practices across the school. Gather support for change across the school and set aside regular time throughout the year to focus on this project and review progress.

FIGURE 3. AN EVIDENCE-INFORMED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT CYCLE

STEP 1
Decide what you want to achieve
Identify school priorities using **internal data** and **professional judgement**.

STEP 2
Identifying possible solutions
External evidence from this guidance and elsewhere can be used to inform choices.

STEP 3
Giving the idea the best chance of success
Applying the **ingredients of effective implementation**.

STEP 4
Did it work?
Evaluate the impact of your decisions and identify potential improvements for the future.

STEP 5
Securing and spreading change
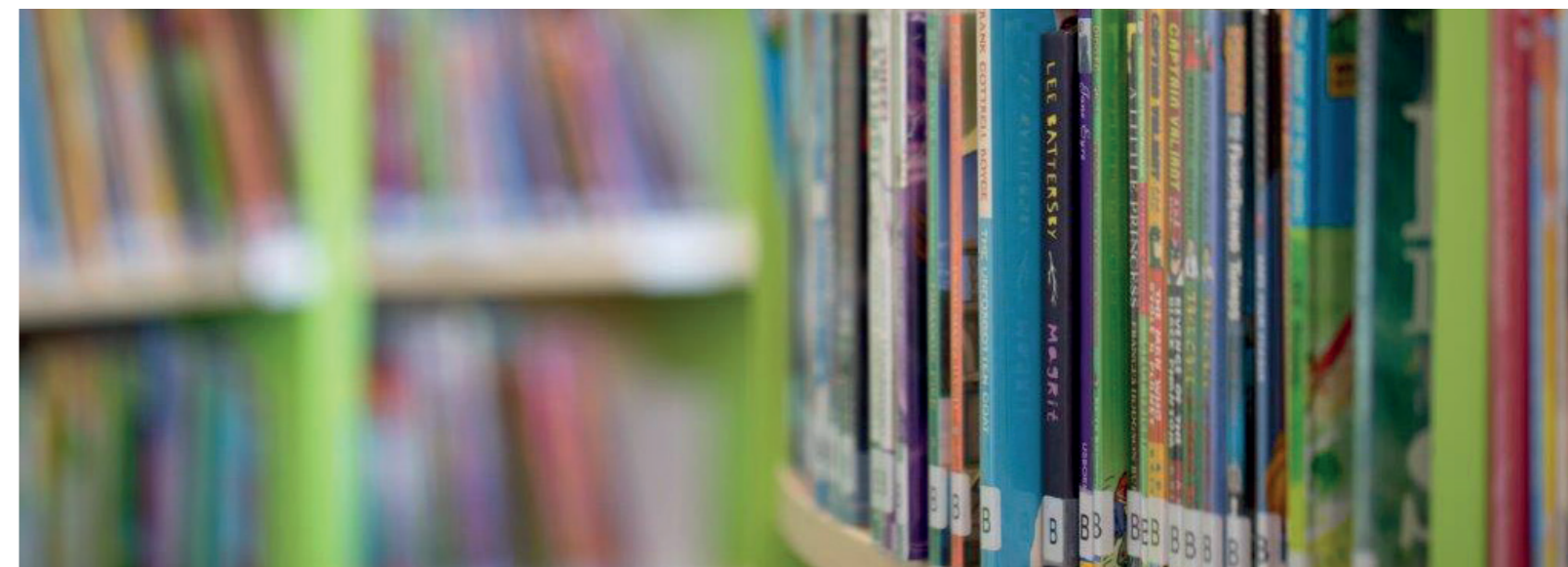**Mobilise the knowledge** and use the findings to inform the work of the school to grow or stop the intervention.

This guidance report draws on the best available evidence regarding the teaching of literacy to primary-aged pupils. The primary source of evidence for the recommendations is the Teaching and Learning Toolkit, which is a synthesis of international research evidence developed by Professor Steve Higgins and colleagues at the University of Durham with the support of the Sutton Trust and the EEF. However, the report also draws on a wide range of evidence from other studies and reviews regarding literacy development and teaching. The emphasis is on rigorous evaluations that provide reliable evidence of an impact on pupil learning outcomes. The intention is to provide a reliable foundation of what is effective, based on robust evidence.

The report was developed over several stages. The initial stage produced a scoping document that set out the headline recommendations and supporting evidence. This was subjected to an academic peer review. The feedback from this review informed the writing of a final draft of the report which was then subjected to a second external review by a group of academics, practitioners, and other stakeholders.

An evidence rating which represents the authors' judgement regarding the strength of the evidence base is provided for each recommendation. The authors considered three features of the evidence when creating the ratings:

1. **quality and quantity**—recommendations that were based on a large number of high-quality studies such as meta-analyses or randomised controlled trials received higher ratings;

2. **consistency**—recommendations that were based on relatively consistent evidence received higher ratings; and

3. **relevance**—recommendations based on evidence that directly related to pupils aged 7–11 received stronger ratings.

We would like to thank the many researchers and practitioners who provided support and feedback in producing this guidance. We would like to give particular thanks to Professors Roger Beard, Greg Brooks, Charles Hulme, Christine Merrell, Kathy Silva, Robert Slavin and Maggie Snowling.

Diagnostic assessment	An assessment that aims to identify a pupil's current strengths and weaknesses so as to determine the most helpful teaching strategies and content to move the pupil forwards. It can be distinguished from tracking or monitoring where the aim is just to check progress. Diagnostic assessment aims to make teaching more efficient.
Etymology	The study of the origins and history of words and the way in which their meanings have changed. The etymology of 'phonics', for example, is from the Greek 'phone' meaning 'voice'. It was originally used in the 17th Century to mean the science of sound, but has now come to mean an approach to teaching reading.
Expressive vocabulary	The words that a pupil can express through speaking or writing.
Grapheme	A letter or combination of letters used to represent a phoneme, for example, in the word 'push', the graphemes <p>, <u>, <sh> represent the phonemes /p/ ʊ/ /ʃ/ to make the work 'push' and phonetically /pʊʃ/.
Grapheme-phoneme correspondences	The relationship between sounds the letters that represent those sounds.
Inference	Using information from a text in order to arrive at another piece of information that is implicit.
Meta-analysis	A particular type of systematic research review which focuses on the quantitative evidence from different studies and combines these statistically to seek a more reliable or more robust conclusion than can be drawn from separate studies.
Morphemes	The smallest units of words that contain meaning, such as the 'root' word 'child' and the affix '-ish', which in combination make a new word 'childish'.
Morphology	The form and meaning of a language; the study of the smallest units of words that contain meaning.
Orthography	The rules for writing a language, including spelling, punctuation and capitalisation.
Phoneme	A phoneme is a speech sound. It is the smallest unit of spoken language that distinguishes one word (or word part) from another. For example, 't' and 'p' in tip and dip. Phonemes are represented with a range of symbols as most letters can be pronounced in different ways.
Phonemic awareness	The ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words, and the understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds. Phonemic awareness involves hearing language at the phoneme level.

Phonics	An approach to teaching reading that focuses on the sounds represented by letters in words.
Reading comprehension	The ability to understand the meaning of a text.
Reading fluency	The ability to read quickly, accurately, and with appropriate stress and intonation.
Receptive vocabulary	The words that a pupil can understand through reading or listening.
Transcription	The physical process of handwriting or typing, and spelling.

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