

Discussion Guide

Discussion Guide for Module 16: Foundations of Literacy

Module run time: 20 minutes

Estimated time to complete the module with discussion guide: 45-60 minutes

Below are recommended stopping points and suggested questions to use in your group's discussion. Please feel free to follow your group's lead and discuss topics and questions that are of greatest value to the group!

Key points:

- Spoken language skills serve as the foundation for literacy development. Literacy involves years of systematic instruction and practice.
- Children may enter kindergarten with a range of pre-literacy skills. It is important for teachers to provide a rich literacy environment for all children. Reading to and with children is a great way to boost pre-literacy skills.
- The brain is not born to read. With practice, our brains learn to recognize words, match words with sounds, and associate those words with meaning.
- Many different factors contribute to a child's pre-literacy skills. Some people have more difficulty learning to read than others. However, this does not mean that they won't learn eventually, or that they are less intelligent.

Module synopsis:

Page 1: *Title Page – Foundations of Literacy*

Page 2: *Acknowledgments*

Page 3: *Introduction*

Page 4: *Let's Meet Alex*

Page 5: *Let's Meet Chris*

☪ Recommended stopping point

- What kind of books do you read in the classroom or at home? How do you incorporate reading into your daily routine?
- Children may enter kindergarten with a range of pre-literacy skills. How might you help a child or student who struggles with these skills? What types of activities could you prepare to create a rich literacy environment that includes children at all skill levels?

Page 6: *Phonemes*

Page 7: *Foundations of Literacy*

Page 8: *Phonological Awareness Instruction*

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⦿ Recommended stopping point

- **Phonological awareness** is the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken language. It is an important skill as children learn to read. Teachers can use phoneme “play” to improve children’s phonological awareness. **Phoneme “play”** involves breaking apart the sounds in words then combining those sounds in new ways. Take a couple minutes to come up with a simple game like the ones described in the module. How do games like this help improve children’s pre-literacy skills?
- Reading with children is one of the best tools parents and teachers have. Not only does it strengthen a child’s pre-literacy toolkit, but it can also help build other foundational skills. What skills might this include, and how does reading foster them? (For example, think about social skills and critical thinking.)

Page 9: *Brain Mechanics*

Page 10: *Reading is a Complex Process*

Page 11: *The Reading System*

Page 12: *Genetics*

⦿ Recommended stopping point

- The **visual word form area** is a specialized region of the brain wired to process words. It only develops after hundreds of hours of practice with reading. With enough practice, it allows us to automatically recognize words without having to sound out each letter. Try to remember when you first started learning to read. Did it take a long time for you to read each word? Did you get faster over time? Perhaps you learned a second language later in life. When you started reading in the new language, was it more difficult than reading in your native language? Why might this be?
- Genetics play a role in people’s ability to learn how to read. This process may be easier or harder for someone, based on their genetic makeup. Think back to when we introduced Alex and Chris. Now that you have learned about the complex process of learning to read, what factors might have contributed to their different pre-literacy skill levels? (For example, think about language experience and genetics.) What unique supports could we provide to each of them as they develop they learn to read? How might the supports we provide be to Chris be similar or different to the ones we provide for Alex?

Page 13: *Conclusion*

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To learn more about literacy development, take a look at these resources:

[Brain Development & Education Lab](#)

Check out our lab webpage to stay up-to-date with the latest recommendations from our lab!

[Colorín Colorado](#)

Colorín Colorado provides resources for educators and families of English language learners (ELLs) in Grades PreK-12.

[The Essentials of Early Literacy Instruction](#)

This article from the National Association for the Education of Young Children provides information and activity ideas to help support early literacy development.

[News You Can Use | Foundations of School Readiness: Language and Literacy](#)

This resource from the Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center provides strategies to help support children as they develop language and literacy skills.

[Planned Language Approach: The Big 5 Series](#)

This resource from the federal government provides resources on how to support children's language and early literacy development in 5 key areas, background knowledge, oral language and vocabulary; book knowledge and print concepts, alphabet knowledge and early writing, and phonological awareness.

[Professional Development Module | Dialogic Reading that Supports Children Who Are Dual Language Learners and Their Families](#)

Learn how to use the dialogic reading strategy to support early literacy skills in children who are dual language learners.

[Reading Rockets](#)

Reading Rockets is a national multimedia literacy initiative that provides resources on how young kids learn to read, why so many struggle, and how adults can help.

We are constantly working to improve our materials. Do you have suggestions about topics to add to this guide? Did your group discuss something we didn't suggest? We'd love to hear from you! Please email your thoughts to us at ilabsout@uw.edu.

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