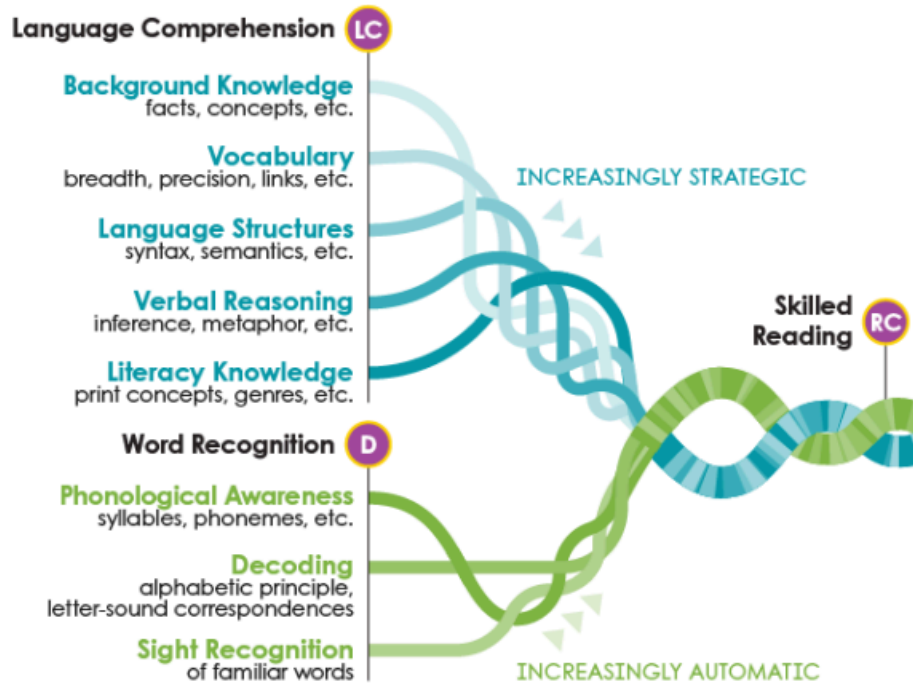


Ensuring a Strong Literacy Foundation

Accurate word reading does not guarantee understanding. Meaning depends on word knowledge, sentence structure, and how ideas connect. Scarborough's Reading Rope shows that reading is not a handoff from decoding to comprehension.

As reading becomes more automatic, attention shifts to meaning. How students process vocabulary and language becomes just as important as how accurately they read the words.

These demands are shaped by how different areas of language work together.



The Shift from Word Recognition to Language Processing

Students must make sense of how words function within sentences and how ideas connect across a text. This requires more than accurate word reading. It requires language knowledge that supports interpretation in real time.

Scarborough's Reading Rope helps illustrate this. Students rely on phonological awareness and decoding to read words accurately and automatically, but that is only part of the process. Language systems shape how those words are understood, connected, and used.

Vocabulary and morphology support word-level understanding. They help students learn new words, analyze unfamiliar ones, and recognize patterns that carry meaning. Syntax makes sentence structure visible, allowing students to interpret how ideas relate within and across sentences. Pragmatics adds another layer, shaping how meaning shifts based on context, tone, and purpose.

These elements do not operate separately. They interact continuously, with each placing demands on and supporting the others. As these systems develop together, students move beyond recognizing words. They begin to process how language carries meaning, connect ideas more efficiently, and engage with increasingly complex text.

What Students Need to Navigate Complex Text

As demands increase, students rely on more than accurate word recognition. They must process language while managing morphologically complex words, nuanced, or figurative use of known vocabulary and ideas that build across a text.

Strong literacy systems develop:

Decoding & Morphological Awareness

to analyze unfamiliar words and build flexibility with academic and informational vocabulary.

Vocabulary Knowledge

that supports how words work, helping students learn, connect, and apply meaning flexibly across contexts.

Syntax & Sentence-Level Engagement

that make structure and relationships between ideas visible, helping students use words accurately within sentences.

Oral Language

that supports processing, discussion, and expression, with structured opportunities to use new vocabulary in complete sentences to justify, explain, and respond.

These elements do not operate separately. They interact continuously, and a gap in one area places additional strain on the others.

Students with limited word knowledge must work harder to make sense of morphologically complex words. A student may recognize every word in a sentence, but still lack the understanding needed to interpret its full meaning, especially when language becomes more abstract.

What Integrated Instruction Makes Possible

When phonics, morphology, vocabulary, and oral language are taught in coordination as a unified approach to word study and meaning-making, students develop the tools to meet text demands as they grow.

They don't just read the words! They understand how words are built, what they might mean in context, how they relate to other words, and how they function within sentences. That combination is what allows students to move from reading accurately to reading with comprehension. This is what students need to carry that capacity into increasingly complex texts, subjects, and grades.





The Importance of Red, Ripe, and Orchard:

Why Semantically Related Words Matter

Jen Knapp, Amy E. Vanden Boogart, Ed.D., Beth Lawrence, MA, CCC-SLP

Semantic Reasoning

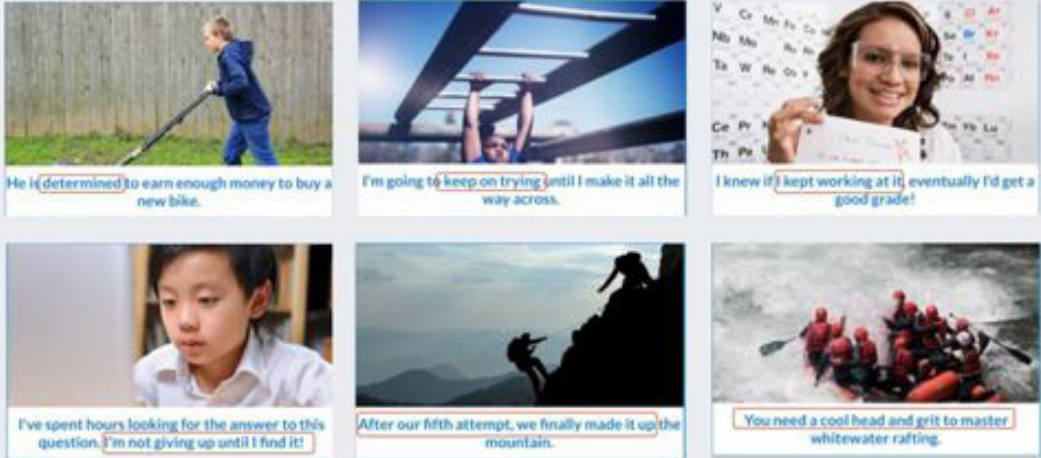
- Semantic Reasoning (Fallon, Lawrence, & Seifert, 2016) leverages students' use of context, linguistic, and cognitive clues, increases students' awareness of words, and helps them capitalize on associations such as categories, examples, synonyms and antonyms to more deeply learn word meanings.
- Semantic Reasoning allows students to understand and use words based on their meanings and relationships with other words.
- Semantic Reasoning requires student engagement, by asking the students to infer and deduce the definitions for themselves.
- Two published research studies found semantic reasoning instruction (using InferCabulary) was significantly faster and more effective not only for students who struggle, but for all students.

Research shows benefits for comprehension when instruction focuses on depth of word knowledge and semantic organization.

Semantic Reasoning increases students' DEPTH of word learning.

How Does This Look in the Classroom?

perseverance



Only after engaging and inferring the common thread among the images and related words from the captions, the student is asked to construct or complete a definition. For example, “Perseverance is a personality trait describing people who: a) get frustrated; b) like adventure; c) never quit until they complete their goal.”

How to pick words for instruction:

- If your primary goal is teaching decoding and encoding, add a meaning layer to the words students are learning to decode.
- What about all the other words?
 - A common approach is to select Tier 2 words for explicit instruction. Tier 2 words are great, but that’s a lot of words.
 - Using our selection process can help you to choose the best Tier 2 words for the most effective instruction.

Guiding Questions When Choosing Vocabulary for Explicit Instruction

Frequency

How often will students encounter this word in texts?

Context

Does this word appear in more than one class or situation?

Semantics

Is this word related to other words that are important to understanding a larger concept?

Morphology

Does this word contain an affix that would allow for the understanding of additional words?

Levels of Abstraction

Does this word have nuance, connotation, abstract meaning, or multiple meanings?

Relation to the Lesson

How much of the students’ success with comprehension relies on this word?

How to design a semantic reasoning vocabulary lesson

1 Choose 5-10 Tier 2 vocabulary targets from content and literature:

2 Have students rate familiarity with chosen words:

	This word is new to me	I have heard it before	I can give a related word	I can define it with three associations
converge	✓			
pavement			✓	
tracks				✓
road		✓		
drive				✓

3 Prepare student-friendly definitions.

Category

Converge is an **action**

Action/Function

Where **things** come together

Extra Associations

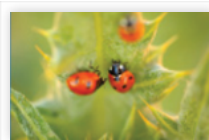
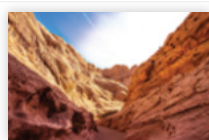
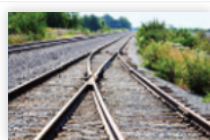
In **one location** and at the **same time**.

4 Gather pictures showing the word in different contexts.



5 Arrange 4-6 pictures on a single slide or page.

Converge

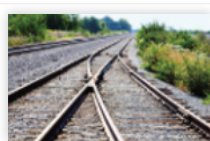


6 Write student-friendly captions for each image containing word associations.

Converge



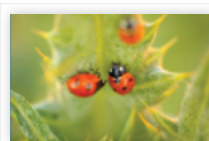
The buildings seem to come together when I look up.



The mountains join together and form a valley.



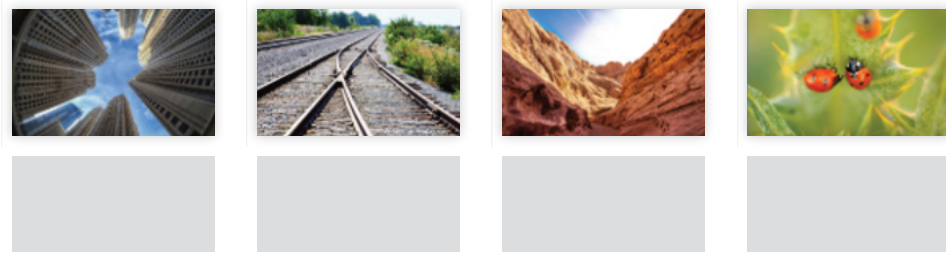
The train tracks merged at the turn.



The ladybugs met on the same leaf.

7 Cover the captions and definitions before starting the lesson.

Converge



8 Prepare a think-aloud script to model the semantic reasoning process.

- Why are ALL these pictures on this page?
- What do I notice about these pictures?
- What do the pictures have in common?
- How do these pictures relate to the word?
- What additional information do the captions reveal about the pictures? • How does my definition compare with this definition?
- Should I adjust my thinking about the word?