
THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO THE SCIENCE OF READING IN ACTION

Most school librarians are already familiar with the Science of Reading, which is a research-based framework explaining how students learn to read. But understanding the framework is only the beginning. The true power of the Science of Reading emerges when we translate it into everyday library practices that reinforce what happens in the classroom, empower teachers, and support every student's reading journey.

While school librarians aren't necessarily in the position to teach explicit reading instruction, they are in the position to extend it. The library then becomes the bridge between learning to read and reading to learn. It is the place where reading science meets reading joy.

Collections That Complement Instruction

The school library's collection is one of its strongest tools for supporting the Science of Reading. Thoughtful curation ensures that students and teachers have access to resources that reinforce decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Ways to apply this:

- Include decodable texts that align with classroom phonics instruction.
- Balance controlled vocabulary books with rich, complex texts that build background knowledge.
- Use genre labels or spine tags to help teachers quickly locate phonics-aligned resources.
- Curate booklists that pair informational texts with fiction titles to build content knowledge and vocabulary.
- Audit your early literacy section for variety in text levels, representation, and readability.

Instruction That Deepens Reading Skills

Library instruction can reinforce core literacy skills by weaving comprehension, vocabulary, and text analysis into authentic reading and inquiry experiences.

Strategies:

- Model fluent, expressive reading during read-alouds and guided reading experiences.
- Teach students how to analyze text structures and recognize patterns across genres.
- Incorporate morphology (prefixes, suffixes, roots) into research and vocabulary lessons.
- Use informational literacy lessons to strengthen background knowledge. This is an essential part of comprehension.
- Embed metacognitive strategies like “thinking aloud” to demonstrate how skilled readers make meaning.

Collaboration That Connects Classroom and Library

The Science of Reading thrives when librarians and teachers work together. By aligning instruction and resources, librarians help reinforce reading foundations across the curriculum.

Ideas for collaboration:

- Co-plan lessons that integrate phonics and comprehension into content areas.
- Provide teachers with curated book sets to match phonics patterns or vocabulary themes.
- Offer mini professional learning sessions or resource spotlights about decoding, fluency, or morphology.
- Use data from reading specialists or classroom teachers to identify students who need targeted reading practice opportunities in the library.

Environment That Encourages Practice and Joy

Students need both skill and motivation to become lifelong readers. The school library environment can nurture both by making reading visible, social, and rewarding.

Ideas to try:

- Create a “Read It, Hear It, See It” display featuring audiobooks, decodables, and high-interest print books.

- Highlight student reading milestones or “reading growth journeys.”
- Incorporate independent reading stations with decodable texts, whisper phones, or read-aloud recordings.
- Showcase how the Science of Reading connects to the joy of story through bulletin boards or literacy nights.

Leadership That Amplifies Literacy

School librarians are literacy leaders. Understanding the Science of Reading helps librarians advocate for balanced, evidence-based practices while preserving the joy and curiosity that sustain lifelong readers.

You can lead by:

- Sharing trusted literacy resources with staff.
- Clarifying misconceptions about the Science of Reading.
- Advocating for access to a variety of high-quality books that support skill *and* engagement.
- Using library data (circulation, collaboration, and instructional impact) to show how your program strengthens literacy outcomes.

Quick Wins for School Librarians

- Pair decodables with engaging read-alouds to balance skill and joy.
- Offer teachers themed “book bundles” that align with current phonics or comprehension units.
- Host a “Science of Reading in Action” staff showcase featuring library resources.
- Embed vocabulary-rich texts into every content area connection.
- Reinforce morphology, background knowledge, and comprehension across research lessons.