



Background Knowledge Guidance

School Year 2022–2023

How will you ensure instructional coherence and continuity after adjusting the pacing guide?

Fewer units/modules will ensure that students have time to engage in the background knowledge building, fluency practice, vocabulary work, and syntax work necessary to access grade-level complex texts. **What is most important deserves more time**, and teachers need the latitude to provide responsive feedback and allow time for productive struggle.

Abundant time should be built into the pacing calendar for the following:

- Background Knowledge Guidance (this document)
- **Vocabulary Guidance**
- **Fluency Guidance**
- **Syntax Guidance**

Consider the below actions to help support students.





1. Dismiss your assumptions.

“The first step to building context and background knowledge is to examine your own preconceptions about your learners. It’s important to understand that differences in background knowledge are not deficits. There is no doubt that all students bring their own knowledge, experiences and language into the classroom. In fact, these unique qualities and characteristics can help you foster cultural awareness in the classroom.”¹

2. Determine key knowledge demands.

For students to engage fully with a complex text, you must determine the knowledge that is necessary to build in advance of or while reading a complex text (i.e., the knowledge that the author assumes the reader already has and/or knowledge that is critical to helping a reader unlock meaning that is not provided in the text or in other texts in a unit/module).

3. Gather relevant data to determine who needs a scaffold.

Understanding what knowledge students already have is critical to enabling you to plan efficiently and maximize classroom instructional time. Determine the extent to which students need the opportunity to build background knowledge in the curriculum to “level the playing field,” then plan ways to help students demonstrate what they already know about a topic. For example:

- Complete a **background knowledge inventory**.
- Conduct a **prior knowledge self-assessment**.
- Complete a **notice and wonder activity**.
- Use an **anticipation guide**.
- Engage in a **carousel walk** (see “Carousel Walk” p. 36).
- Preview the title and reflect on initial understandings.
- Use entry slips.

¹ Ellevation Team Members, “Help English Language Learners Build Background Knowledge in the Classroom,” Ellevation, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://ellevationeducation.com/blog/help-english-language-learners-build-background-knowledge-classroom>.





4. Select and employ an appropriate scaffold.

Once you understand what students need to know to access a text, you can leverage these strategies in advance of or while reading the text to help students build the necessary background knowledge (avoid giving students background knowledge they will learn through other texts in the unit/module). For example:

- Read a volume of short, less complex texts about a topic.
- Show a video.
- Use paintings or **photo sets**.
- Engage in a **brief experience** (see “Building Background Through Experiences” p. 43).
- Build background knowledge through **virtual experiences** (see “Building Background Knowledge Virtually” p. 42).
- Build **concept maps**.
- Connect with experts.
- Leverage home language support (e.g., texts, web links, or video; time to discuss and clarify ideas about text).
- Utilize the back matter.

5. Gather the data to measure the impact.

After you have employed a background knowledge building scaffold, you will want to know the extent to which it supported students in accessing the text. **Analyze student work** and use the data to inform instructional next steps.





Supporting resources

In addition to the footnoted references, the resources below informed our work on this document.

Cervetti, Gina N. and Elfrida H. Hiebert. “Knowledge, Literacy, and the Common Core.” TextProject, Inc. March 2014.
<http://www.textproject.org/assets/publications/Cervetti-Hiebert-2015-Knowledge-Literacy-and-the-Common-Core.pdf>

Ellevation Team Members. “Help English Language Learners Build Background Knowledge in the Classroom.” Ellevation. Accessed July 14, 2021.
<https://ellevationeducation.com/blog/help-english-language-learners-build-background-knowledge-classroom>.

“Instructional Routines & Practices: Building Background Knowledge.” *KIPP Teacher Resource Guide*. Accessed July 14, 2021.
<https://trg.kipp.org/instructional-routines-and-practices/background-knowledge/>.

Lent, ReLeah Cossett. “Chapter 2. Background Knowledge: The Glue That Makes Learning Stick.” In *Overcoming Textbook Fatigue: 21st Century Tools to Revitalize Teaching and Learning*. 30–49. Alexandria: ASCD, 2012.
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/113005/chapters/Background-Knowledge@-The-Glue-That-Makes-Learning-Stick.aspx>

Student Achievement Partners. “Reading as Liberation—An Examination of the Research Base: How Equity, Acceleration, and Personalization Improve Student Learning.” *Achieve the Core*. February 2021.
<https://achievethecore.org/content/upload/EquityAccelerationPersonalizationFullReport.pdf>

Smith, Reid, Pamela Snow, Tanya Serry, and Lorraine Hammond. “The Role of Background Knowledge in Reading Comprehension: A Critical Review.” *Reading Psychology* 42, no. 3 (February 22, 2021): 214–40.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02702711.2021.1888348>.

