



Publisher's Response, Extended Version

To The Reading League's Curriculum Evaluation Report, May 2026

We are grateful to The Reading League for the time, care, and rigor they invested in evaluating Reading Simplified, and for the broader work of reviewing many of the country's most widely used reading programs. We share The Reading League's mission of advancing evidence-aligned reading instruction, and we are honored to be part of this effort. This response offers context on what the review found and how Reading Simplified fits into a comprehensive evidence-aligned literacy system.

Summary of Review Findings

The review's findings affirm that Reading Simplified is aligned with the science of reading across the foundational components central to our program's design:

Foundational Reading Components

Word Recognition Non-Negotiables—every criterion in this section was found as an evidence-aligned practice

Phonological and Phoneme Awareness—every criterion in this section was found as an evidence-aligned practice

Phonics and Phonic Decoding—nearly every criterion was found as an evidence-aligned practice

Fluency—every criterion was found as an evidence-aligned practice

Spelling—nearly every criterion was found as an evidence-aligned practice

Principles of the Learning Sciences

The review also affirmed that Reading Simplified incorporates key principles of the learning sciences, including deliberate and purposeful practice, retrieval practice, spaced and distributed practice, cumulative practice, interleaved practice, cohesion across program components, and materials that are intrinsically interesting and engaging for students.

Embedded Supports for Language and Vocabulary

Reading Simplified is a foundational reading program intended to be paired with a high-quality core ELA program. Even within that scope, reviewers acknowledged that the Reading Simplified system includes embedded scaffolds for vocabulary, comprehension, background knowledge, and connected reading—woven into our daily routines rather than treated as separate strands.

THE REVIEW ALSO NOTED THESE EXPLICIT STRENGTHS:

"A strong emphasis is placed on mapping phonemes to graphemes throughout the program."

"The practice opportunities in Reading Simplified occur frequently, are cumulative, and place a strong emphasis on phonics mastery."

"Reading Simplified's instructional routines are highly structured, skill-specific, and cumulative."

"Reading Simplified demonstrates strong decoding and encoding instruction through its systematic phonics scope and sequence, explicit blending routines, and integrated Word Work activities."

"Reading Simplified incorporates several embedded scaffolds within its instructional routines. Teachers are provided with guided blending prompts, error-responsive coaching strategies, and structured Word Work routines and activities that break decoding and encoding skills into manageable steps."

On Suggested Areas for Refinement

Most of the suggested areas for refinement are areas we agree with. We, too, do not want teachers to learn Reading Simplified through reading a manual alone—and we haven't designed it that way. The review team, consistent with their established review process, did not have access to the *Reading Simplified Academy*, the online professional learning system where teachers actually learn and use our program. The Academy provides video demonstrations of every routine, expert-modeled case-study lessons, training in diagnostic thinking, and individualized coaching through our discussion board and Teachers' Lounge community. The Teacher's Manual, which was the only training support the review team had access to, is an offline companion to that system, not a substitute for it.

This design reflects decades of professional development research. Joyce and Showers (2002) found that theory and study alone (the equivalent of reading a manual) produces near-zero transfer to classroom practice, while combining demonstration, practice, feedback, and coaching raises transfer rates to 95%. For this reason, the usability observations in the report actually reflect a deliberate design choice rather than a gap in support. Schools and districts adopting our program invest in **teacher learning alongside the curriculum**, and our outcome data show that this hybrid model accelerates progress, especially for students with significant reading gaps. We continue to refine the Teacher's Manual itself to make it still clearer for first-time readers, and we welcome the review's specific suggestions toward that end.

Teaching the Spellings of a Vowel Sound Together

The report notes that Reading Simplified introduces the multiple spellings of a vowel sound, for example, **o, oe, oa, ow, and o_e** for long /ō/, together in our *Sort It* routine, rather than one-grapheme-at-a-time. A sound-based organization of the advanced code is not unsystematic; it reflects deliberate, research-informed design.

Reading Simplified explicitly teaches advanced phonics by sound—not by rules, demonstrating the principle about our written code that one sound can have multiple spellings. *Sort It* helps young learners chunk that material into manageable units and releases approximately five letter-sound correspondences per week. Indeed, this is a faster pace than is typical in basal phonics sequences, yet one that recent research suggests may be better for achievement (Demchak & Solari, 2025; Sunde, Furnes, & Lundetræ, 2020).

The instructional cycle is also not "all at once and done." Within a single week, students work with the same five spellings across multiple interconnected activities—repeated *Sort It* practice, five decodable passages read and re-read several times, *Search for the Sound*, *Write It*, and games—and the spellings continue to appear in cumulative review and connected text throughout the year. Recognition of 4 or 5 spellings for each sound is often achieved within the week.

Direct instruction is also explicitly modeled before student practice. For the *Sort It* activity, the Teacher's Manual directs teachers to introduce the target sound and spellings; name that the words "all have the /ō/ sound" but are "spelled in different ways;" and teach a Key Sentence before students begin sorting (pp. 91–92). The Intro to the Advanced Phonics unit in each Student Materials binder models the multi-spelling principle even earlier through teacher-led *Build It* (A-123–125, B-77–79, C-27–29). This is teacher-led instruction, fully consistent with The Reading League's own definition of explicit instruction.

Decodable Text Design

Reading Simplified places students on the appropriate Streamlined Pathway based on actual reading level rather than age or grade. The Grade 1 passage cited in the report, *The Hot Day*, is intended for students who have completed the Kindergarten Pathway, where the relevant patterns and high-frequency words are already taught. A running-word analysis places *The Hot Day* at 95.9% decodable for its intended readers, with the remaining words supported through teacher scaffolding during Guided Oral Reading.

The broader research base on decodability also does not support an all-or-nothing standard (Cheatham & Allor, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2004; Pugh et al., 2023; Hiebert, 2024). Students also need set for variability—the capacity to flexibly revise an initial phonological approximation into a known word—a meaningful contributor to word reading, especially for developing readers (Steady et al., 2022). Reading Simplified's *Flex It* strategy directly trains this capacity within Guided Oral Reading, where students read texts that are mostly decodable for their level, while receiving teacher modeling and corrective feedback.

Oral Reading Fluency Assessment

Reading Simplified explicitly recommends DIBELS for formal progress monitoring in multiple locations of the Teacher's Manual (pp. 6, 112, 114, 150), citing its strong reliability, validity, and convenience for MTSS settings.

Multilingual Learners

Reading Simplified does not include a proprietary home-language assessment like most foundational reading programs. However, the Teacher's Manual directs schools to use DIBELS or an equivalent normed measure, which includes validated Spanish and French versions suitable for multilingual learners. We are continuing to expand our guidance for serving multilingual learners.

Handwriting

Since the materials were submitted for review, Reading Simplified has released a more comprehensive handwriting resource, which we appreciate the review acknowledging.

On the Research Base

Curriculum reviews are one important source of information for schools and districts. They are not the only source. Decision-makers should also weigh a program's underlying research base.

Reading Simplified was developed through years of classroom practice and research, including work connected to the IES-funded Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI) at the University of North Carolina, and later Targeted Reading Instruction (RTI). That 20-year body of work has been recognized by the **What Works Clearinghouse** and has one of the highest effect sizes on **Evidence for ESSA**. This research base helps explain why Reading Simplified emphasizes a streamlined yet flexible 3-component lesson, efficient instructional decision-making, responsiveness to student need, and accelerated movement toward accurate, fluent reading, rather than fixed, scripted, day-by-day plans.

On Continuous Improvement

We are grateful for The Reading League's exacting work and for the specific feedback offered in this report. Reading Simplified is continuously refined based on contemporary research, teacher feedback from our Academy community, and external review of the kind TRL has provided here. We remain committed to supporting schools and districts in delivering evidence-aligned reading instruction that accelerates progress for every student, especially those with the greatest reading gaps.

To learn more about The Reading League's curriculum evaluation work and access additional resources for adoption decisions, visit [The Reading League Compass Curriculum Decision Makers page](#).
