# Contents

## Kindergarten
- Interactive Read-Aloud and Literature Discussion [54](#)
- Shared and Performance Reading [56](#)
- Writing About Reading [58](#)
- Writing [60](#)
- Oral, Visual, and Technological Communication [66](#)
- Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study [68](#)

## Grade 1
- Interactive Read-Aloud and Literature Discussion [72](#)
- Shared and Performance Reading [74](#)
- Writing About Reading [76](#)
- Writing [78](#)
- Oral, Visual, and Technological Communication [84](#)
- Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study [86](#)

## Grade 2
- Interactive Read-Aloud and Literature Discussion [90](#)
- Shared and Performance Reading [92](#)
- Writing About Reading [94](#)
- Writing [96](#)
- Oral, Visual, and Technological Communication [102](#)
- Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study [104](#)

## Guided Reading
- Level A [108](#)
- Level B [110](#)
- Level C [114](#)
- Level D [116](#)
- Level E [120](#)
- Level F [124](#)
- Level G [128](#)
- Level H [132](#)
- Level I [136](#)
- Level J [140](#)
- Level K [144](#)
- Level L [148](#)
- Level M [152](#)
- Level N [156](#)

## Glossary
- 161

## References
- 769
Introduction

Teachers who work together can reach the goal of high student achievement if they share a common vision. This learning continuum presented as a two-volume set and covering grades K–2 and 3–8 is designed to help educators teach from the specific body of understandings that students must acquire to become highly effective users of oral and written language. With this foundation, you can set clear goals for learning and plan specific lessons across many instructional contexts.

Content of the Continuum

Across the seven continua included in this volume, several principles are important to consider:

• **Students learn by talking.** We engage students in conversation that is grounded in a variety of texts—those that students read, hear read aloud, or write—and that expands their ability to comprehend and use language.

• **Students need to process a large amount of written language.** A dynamic language and literacy curriculum provides many daily opportunities for students to independently read books of their choice, to read more challenging instructional material with teacher guidance, and to hear teacher-selected and grade-appropriate texts read aloud.

• **The ability to read and comprehend texts is expanded through talking and writing.** Students need to acquire a wide range of ways to write about their reading and also to talk about texts with the teacher and other students.

• **Learning deepens when students engage in reading, talking, and writing about texts across many different instructional contexts.** Each mode of communication provides a new way to process the ideas learned from oral and written texts and from each other.

This continuum provides a way to look for specific evidence of learning from kindergarten through grade two, and across seven curricular areas. To create it, we examined a wide range of research on language and literacy learning, and we asked teachers and researchers for feedback. We also examined the curriculum standards of many states. Some guiding principles were:
• Learning does not occur in stages but is a continually evolving process.
• The same concepts are acquired and then elaborated over time.
• Many complex literacy concepts take years to develop.
• Children learn by applying what they know to the reading and writing of increasingly complex texts.
• Learning does not automatically happen; most children need expert teaching to develop high levels of reading and writing expertise.
• Learning is different but interrelated across different kinds of language and literacy activities; one kind of learning enhances and reinforces others.

In this volume, we include seven different learning continuua (see Figure I–1). Each of these continua focuses on a different aspect of the language and literacy framework; and each contributes substantially, in different but complementary ways to students’ development of reading, writing, and language processes. Each of the continua is described in more detail in a separate introduction, but we briefly describe them here.

**Reading Process**

Four of the continua specifically address reading: interactive read-aloud and literature discussion, shared and performance reading, guided reading, and writing about reading. Here we focus on strategic actions for thinking:

• **Within the text** (literal understanding achieved through solving words, monitoring and correcting, searching for and using information, summarizing, maintaining fluency, and adjusting for purposes and genre of text)

• **Beyond the text** (making predictions, making connections with personal experience, content knowledge and other texts, inferring what is implied but not stated, and synthesizing new information)

• **About the text** to analyze or critique it

In *interactive read-aloud and literature discussion*, children have the opportunity to extend their understandings through talk. In interactive read-aloud you have the opportunity to engage children with texts that are usually more complex than they can read for themselves. Teachers can take strategic moments to stop for quick discussion during the reading and continue talking after the end. Student talk provides evidence of their thinking.

*Shared and performance reading* offer an authentic reason for reading aloud. As they read in unison or read parts in readers theater, children need to read in
phrases, notice punctuation and dialogue, and think about the meaning of the
text. All of these actions provide evidence that they are understanding the text
and processing it effectively. On these familiar texts, teachers have the oppor-
tunity to support and extend students’ understandings.

**Guided reading** offers small-group support and explicit teaching to help students
take on more challenging texts. As they read texts that are organized along a
gradient of difficulty, students expand their systems of strategic actions by
meeting the demands of increasingly complex texts. They provide evidence of
their thinking through oral reading, talk, and extension through writing. The
guided reading continuum is related to text reading levels rather than grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CURRICULUM COMPONENT</th>
<th>BRIEF DEFINITION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTINUUM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Read-Aloud and Literature Discussion</td>
<td>Students engage in discussion with one another about a text that they have heard read aloud or that they have read independently.</td>
<td>• Year by year, grades K–2 • Genres appropriate to grades K–2 • Specific behaviors and understandings that are evidence of thinking within, beyond, and about the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared and Performance Reading</td>
<td>Students read together or take roles in reading a shared text. They reflect the meaning of the text with their voices.</td>
<td>• Year by year, grades K–2 • Genres appropriate to grades K–2 • Specific behaviors and understandings that are evidence of thinking within, beyond, and about the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing About Reading</td>
<td>Students extend their understanding of a text through a variety of writing genres and sometimes with illustrations.</td>
<td>• Year by year, grades K–2 • Genres/forms for writing about reading appropriate to grades K–2 • Specific evidence in the writing that reflects thinking within, beyond, and about the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Students compose and write their own examples of a variety of genres, written for varying purposes and audiences.</td>
<td>• Year by year, grades K–2 • Genres/forms for writing appropriate to grades K–2 • Aspects of craft, conventions, and process that are evident in children’s writing, K–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral, Visual, and Technological Communication</td>
<td>Students present their ideas through oral discussion and presentation or through the use of technology.</td>
<td>• Year by year, grades K–2 • Specific behaviors and understandings related to listening and speaking, presentation, and technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study</td>
<td>Students learn about the relationships of letters to sounds as well as the structure of words to help them in reading and spelling.</td>
<td>• Year by year, grades K–2 • Specific behaviors and understandings related to nine areas of understanding related to letters, sounds, and words, and how they work in reading and spelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
<td>Students read a teacher-selected text in a small group; the teacher provides explicit teaching and support for reading increasingly challenging texts.</td>
<td>• Level by level, A to N • Genres appropriate to grades K–2 • Specific behaviors and understandings that are evidence of thinking within, beyond, and about the text • Specific suggestions for word work (drawn from the phonics and word analysis continuum)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
levels because we envision continuous progress along these levels. In the introduction to the guided reading continuum, you will find a chart indicating a range of levels that approximately correlates with goals for each grade level.

In addition to specific evidence of thinking within, beyond, and about a text, each of these three continua described list genres of texts that are appropriate for use at each grade level or text level.

Writing about reading, which often includes drawing, is another way for children to extend their understanding and provide evidence of thinking. Writing about reading may be used in connection with interactive read-aloud and literature discussion or guided reading.

As you work with the continua related to reading, you will see a gradual increase in the complexity of the kinds of thinking that readers do. Most of the principles of learning cannot be pinpointed at one point in time or even one year. You will usually see the same kind of principle (behavior or understanding) repeated across grades or across levels of text; each time remember that the learner is applying the principle in a more complex way to read harder texts.

**Oral and Written Communication**

Writing is a way of experimenting with and deepening understanding of genres students have read. Although writing about reading is an excellent approach to help students extend their thinking and support discussion, it does not take the place of specific instruction devoted to helping students develop as writers. Through the writing workshop, teachers help young writers continually expand their learning of the craft, conventions, and process of writing for the purpose of communicating meaning to an audience. The writing continuum in this book lists specific understandings for each grade level related to craft, conventions, and process. It also suggests genres for students to learn how to write at each grade level.

Oral, visual, and technological communication are integral to all literacy processes; you’ll see their presence in all other continua. This continuum singles out particular behaviors and understandings for intentional instruction.

**Word Study**

Finally, we include a continuum for phonics, spelling, and word study. This grade-by-grade continuum is drawn from the longer continuum published in Phonics Lessons: Letters, Words, and How They Work (Pinnell and Fountas 2003). For each grade, you will find specific principles related to nine areas of learning: (1) early
literacy concepts; (2) phonological awareness; (3) letter knowledge; (4) letter-sound relationships; (5) spelling patterns; (6) high-frequency words; (7) word meaning; (8) word structure; and (9) word-solving actions. Here you will find specific understandings related to spelling, which interface with the section on conventions provided in the writing continuum.

Some Cautions

In preparing these continua we considered the typical range of children that can be found in kindergarten through grade two classrooms. We also consulted teachers about their expectations and vision as to appropriate instruction at each grade level. We thought about the district and state standards we know. We need to have a vision of expected levels of learning because it helps in making effective instructional decisions; and even more important, it helps us to identify students who need intervention.

At the same time, we would not want to apply these expectations in an inflexible way. We need to recognize that children vary widely in their progress—sometimes moving quickly and sometimes getting bogged down. They may make faster progress in one area than another. The continua should help you intervene in more precise ways to help children. But it is also important to remember that learners may not necessarily meet every expectation at all points in time. Nor should any one of the understandings and behaviors included in this document be used as criteria for promotion. Educators can look thoughtfully across the full range of grade-level expectations as they make decisions about individual students.

It is also important to recognize that just because grade-level expectations exist all teaching may not be pitched at that level. Through assessment, you may learn that your class only partially matches the behaviors and understandings on the continuum. Almost all teachers find that they need to consult the material at lower and higher levels (one reason that the guided reading continuum is not graded).

Ways to Use the Continuum

We see many different uses for this continuum, including the following.

Foundation for Teaching

As you think about individual, small-group, and whole-group instruction, you may consult different areas of the continuum. For example, if you are working with students in guided reading at level M, use the lists of behaviors and understandings to plan introductions, guide observations and interactions with individuals, and shape teaching points. The word work section will give specific
suggestions for principles to explore at the end of the guided reading lessons. You can plan embedded teaching as you examine the section on interactive read-aloud and literature discussion. The interactive read-aloud and literature discussion as well as the writing and word study continua, will be useful in planning explicit minilessons.

**Guide for Curriculum Planning**

The continuum can also be used by a grade-level team or school staff to plan the language and literacy curriculum. It offers a starting point for thinking very specifically about goals and expectations. Your team may adapt the continuum to meet your own goals and district expectations.

**Linking Assessment and Instruction**

Sometimes assessment is administered and the results recorded, but then the process stops. Teachers are unsure what to do with the data or where to go next in their teaching. This continuum can be used as a bridge between assessment data and the specific teaching that students need. With assessment, you learn what students know; the continuum will help you think about what they need to know next.

**Evaluation and Grading**

The continuum can also serve as a guide for evaluating student progress over time. You can evaluate whether students are meeting grade-level standards. Remember that no student would be expected to demonstrate every single competency to be considered on grade level. Grade level is always a term that encompasses a range of levels of understanding at any given time.

**Reporting to Parents**

We would not recommend that you show parents such an overwhelming document as this continuum. It would get in the way of good conversation. However, you can use the continuum as a resource for the kind of information you need to provide to parents, but in easy-to-understand language.

**Guide to Intervention**

Many students will need extra support in order to achieve the school’s goals for learning. Assessment and observation will help you identify the specific areas in
which students need help. Use the continuum to find the specific understandings that can guide intervention.

**Organization of the Continuum**

Seven continua are included in this document. They are arranged in the following way.

**Grade by Grade**

Within each grade, you will find the continua for: (1) interactive read-aloud and literature discussion; (2) shared and performance reading; (3) writing about reading; (4) writing; (5) oral, visual, and technological communication; and (6) phonics, spelling, and word study. These six continua are presented at each grade level, kindergarten through grade two. You can turn to the tabbed section for your grade level and find all six. If you have students working below grade level, you can consult the next lower grade continuum in the area of interest; if you have students working above grade level, you can consult the continuum for the grade above for ideas.

**Level by Level**

The guided reading continuum is organized according to Fountas and Pinnell text gradient levels A to N. These levels typically correlate to grades K, 1, and 2, but students may vary along them in their instructional levels. It is important for all students to receive guided reading instruction at a level that allows them to process texts successfully with teacher support. If your students are able to process texts effectively at level N you can supplement their reading with higher-level texts, always remembering that they need to read age appropriate material. You can consult the continuum document for grades 3–8 if it is available in your school; you should recognize that you have a student who is well above grade level and probably needs access to more challenging material.

**Additional Resources**

Finally, you will find a glossary of terms at the end of the book that will assist you in interpreting the continuum. For additional information on instruction, consult the texts in the references section, also found at the end of this book.
Interactive Read-Aloud and Literature Discussion Continuum

In creating curriculum goals for an interactive read-aloud, you will want to consider text selection and opportunities for new learning. At all grade levels, students need to listen to texts in a variety of genres and increasingly complex texts within those genres. Story problems, characters, content, and topics should be matched to the particular age group, with consideration of students' background, experience, and interests. You will also want to consider a variety of text formats and types of texts.

Beyond text selection, it is important to think about how to support readers' thinking within, beyond, and about a text. Before, during, and after listening to a text read-aloud, you will want to notice evidence of students' literal understanding. Did they pick up important information? Could they follow the plot? Could they remember important details? In addition, you want students to think beyond the text, making predictions and important connections. Look for evidence that they can notice and incorporate new information into their own understandings, as well as make inferences based on the available information. Finally, you want students to form opinions about their reading and develop their own reading preferences. Look for evidence that they can think analytically about texts, noticing the writer's craft and style; it is also important for them to think critically about the quality, content, and accuracy of texts.

When students are actively listening to and discussing a text, all of the strategic actions for comprehending are in operation. In an interactive read-aloud, the listener is freed from decoding and is supported by the oral reader's fluency, phrasing, and stress—all elements of what we sometimes call expression. The scene is set for a high level of comprehending or thinking together through a text.

Interactive Read-Aloud and Literature Discussion

From kindergarten through eighth grade, literature study and discussion are a part of shared reading and interactive read-aloud (see Fountas and Pinnell 2001, 2006). Students may discuss the book as a whole class but they will also need to be engaged in more intimate routines like a “turn and talk” (focused on any aspect of text) for a minute or two a few times within the larger discussion. These types of routines provide opportunities for individuals to engage in more talk than would otherwise be possible in a whole-group discussion. Inserting such routines into your interactive read-aloud will make whole-group discussions more lively and give all students the opportunity for active participation. After students have spent some time talking in pairs, triads, or small circles, they will become skilled in small-group discussion. After students have had a great deal of
experience using the routines, you may decide they are ready for a more extended
discussion with their peers—literature discussion or book club. You can find ex-
tensive information about these instructional approaches in Teaching for Compre-
hending and Fluency: Thinking, Talking, and Writing About Reading, K–8 (Fountas
and Pinnell 2006).

Interactive read-aloud and literature discussion abound with text talk—shared
talk in which students examine ideas and thinking about narrative, expository, or
poetic texts. Every engagement gives students opportunities for thinking about
texts in new ways. The more they have a chance to do it, the better they get at text
talk. As students work together in groups, they develop a backlog of shared
meanings that increasingly deepens their talk.

Interactive read-aloud and literature discussion are placed together in this
continuum because in both settings we seek age-appropriate, grade-appropriate
reading materials that have the potential to extend students’ thinking and their
ability to talk about texts. For kindergarten and grade-one students, most litera-
ture discussions will take place during interactive read-aloud. But as students gain
more experience through turn and talk routines, they can begin to prepare for and
engage in small group discussions. For small-group literature discussion, students
usually choose from several texts that you have preselected. If they can read the
selection independently, they read at home or during the reading workshop. If
they cannot read the text easily on their own, make an audio recording of it avail-
able or set up a support system with another student or family member reading
the text aloud. Sometimes, you will engage students in book clubs based on texts
that you have read aloud to the entire class. Thus, in selecting and using books for
interactive read-aloud and literature discussion, you do not need to consider a
specific level, but you will want to think about the text characteristics as well as
texts that are age and grade appropriate.

Framework for the Continuum of Learning

The continuum that follows is a guide for setting goals and creating instructional
plans for interactive read-aloud and literature discussion. This continuum pro-
vides grade-by-grade information that includes:

• characteristics of texts (descriptions of text factors to keep in mind when select-
ing and reading aloud texts)

• curriculum goals (descriptions of behaviors to teach, notice, and support to help
readers think within, beyond, and about the text you have selected)

Characteristics of Texts

Ten text factors are important to consider when selecting texts for any kind of
reading instruction. When selecting texts for interactive read-aloud, we consider
the high level of support we provide to students to help them process or think about the text. You must assure that the vocabulary in the text is understandable to listeners, you don’t need to worry about word-solving difficulty since you will be doing the decoding. Descriptions of all ten text factors, in terms of interactive read-aloud, follow.

1. **Genre.** We have listed a variety of types of texts that are appropriate at each grade level. For the most part, you will want to use the full range of genres at every grade level, but be selective about the particular examples you choose.

2. **Text Structure.** The structure of a text refers to the way it is organized. Fiction texts are generally organized in a narrative structure, with a problem and a sequence of events that leads to the resolution of the problem. Interactive read-aloud is a context in which listeners can internalize plot structure and learn how stories work. Nonfiction texts may also be narrative; biographies, for example, usually tell the stories like fiction texts do. But most informational texts are organized categorically by subtopic with underlying structures such as description, temporal sequence, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, and problem and solution. Often these structures are used in combination. Interactive read-aloud and literature discussion provide a setting within which you can teach students to recognize and understand these structures.

3. **Content.** The subject matter of the text should be accessible and interesting to listeners. Over time, the sophistication and complexity of content can be increased. Although direct experiences are always necessary for learning, students can acquire a great deal of content knowledge from hearing written language read aloud. Content is helpful to listeners when they already have some prior knowledge to bring to understanding new information.

4. **Themes and Ideas.** The major ideas of the books you choose to read aloud should be appropriate for all students’ age and background experience. Interactive read-aloud is an ideal way to stretch students’ knowledge, but they must be able to make connections to their existing knowledge. They can extend their own understanding of the themes and ideas as they discuss them with others.

5. **Language and Literary Features.** The way the writer uses language creates the literary quality of a text. It is important to select texts that students can understand in terms of language and literary features. Interactive read-aloud and literature discussion provide opportunities to expand your students’ ability to process literary language, including dialogue and figurative language. Other literary features include the development of elements such as setting, plot, and characters.

6. **Sentence Complexity.** The structure of sentences—their length, word order, and the number of embedded phrases and clauses—is another key factor. Through the primary, elementary, and intermediate grades, students can
generally understand sentences that are more complex than those they can read. Interactive read-aloud provides a way to help them gradually internalize more complex sentence structures. Discussion with others will help students unpack complex sentences and understand them better.

7. **Vocabulary.** Vocabulary refers to the words that an individual knows and understands in both oral and written language. The words that the writer has selected may present a challenge to readers. Written text usually includes many words that are not in our everyday oral vocabulary; we constantly expand vocabulary by reading or hearing written language read aloud. Through interactive read-aloud and literature discussion, students can greatly expand their vocabulary.

8. **Words.** When selecting books for students to read for themselves, we always consider the challenges the words present: length, number of syllables, inflectional endings, and general ease of solving. In interactive read-aloud, however, the teacher solves the words, so this will not be a major factor in text selection. Also, remember that for literature discussion, students may use audio recordings of texts that they are not yet ready to read independently. Attention to vocabulary will take into account word complexity.

9. **Illustrations.** Illustrations (or other forms of art) provide a great deal of information to readers and listeners. A high-quality picture book is a coherent form of literary art. Think of a picture book as a short story that has beautiful illustrations. Picture books are appropriate for a wide range of ages and all genres. For students of all ages, illustrations increase engagement and enjoyment. Illustrations for younger children provide a great deal of information; for older students they help create mood. Informational texts (and increasingly some fiction texts) also include graphics in the form of maps, diagrams, and drawings. These graphics may provide information that is additional to the body of the text. Some graphics may be large enough for students to see and discuss during interactive read-aloud, but students may attend to them during small-group discussion.

10. **Book and Print Features.** When selecting books for interactive read-aloud, you may also want to consider the physical aspects of the text, such as length, size, and layout. Book and print features also include tools like the table of contents, glossary, pronunciation guide, indexes, sidebars, and headings. All of these features may be pointed out and discussed during interactive read-aloud or literature discussion.

**Curriculum Goals**

We have stated curriculum goals in terms of behaviors and understandings to notice and support at each level. These are further divided into evidence that the reader is thinking within, beyond, and about the text.
• **Within the Text.** To effectively and efficiently process a text and derive the literal meaning, readers must solve the words and monitor and self-correct their reading. In interactive read-aloud, readers are relieved of the task of decoding and they hear fluent, phrased reading; but they must self-monitor their own understanding, remember information in summary form, and adjust their thinking to the understanding of different fiction and nonfiction genres.

• **Beyond the Text.** Readers make predictions and connections to previous knowledge and their own lives. They also make connections between and among texts. They bring background knowledge to the reading of a text, synthesize new information by incorporating it into their own understandings, and think about what the writer has not stated but implied. Readers may infer the feelings and motivations of characters in fiction texts or the implications of the writer’s statements in nonfiction. Interactive read-aloud provides many opportunities to support students’ thinking beyond the literal meaning. By engaging students in discussion before and after reading, you can demonstrate how to think beyond the text and help them expand their own ability to do so. You can also stop at selected intervals while reading aloud to discuss text elements that prompt expanded thinking.

• **About the Text.** Readers think analytically about the text as an object, noticing and appreciating elements of the writer’s craft, such as use of language, characterization, organization, and structure. Reading like a writer helps students notice aspects of craft and more fully enjoy a text, sometimes revisiting it. Readers also think critically about texts, evaluating the quality and considering the writer’s accuracy or objectivity. Interactive read-aloud time is ideal time for demonstrating the kind of sophisticated thinking that effective readers do. It provides the opportunity for students to engage in analytic thinking about texts. In addition, the books you read aloud become a collection of shared texts that can be turned to again and again to notice more about craft.

**Using the Continuum**

The continuum does not reference specific texts, topics, or content areas. You will apply the continuum’s goals in connection with your district or state requirements. You can use this guide to set overall curriculum goals for grades K–2 or you can refer to it as you plan for interactive read-aloud.

We use the term *intentional conversation* to describe the instructional moves you can make during the conversation surrounding books in interactive read-aloud or in small-group literature discussion. Your first goals when reading aloud to your students and engaging them in small-group discussions are to engage
their interest, to make the occasion enjoyable, and to guide them in active conversation. Interactive read-aloud and literature discussion give students opportunities to share their own ideas, to express their own meanings, and to contribute to deeper understanding of the text. Conversation must be genuine. You are always keeping in mind your curriculum goals, that is, what makes the conversation intentional.

Without being heavy handed or stifling students’ comments, you can guide the conversation so that students are constantly expanding their thinking. During the interactive read-aloud and literature discussion, the teacher:

- Keeps in mind the systems of strategic action that readers must use.
- Knows the text deeply and understands its demands and the opportunities it provides for learning.
- Provides conversational leads to focus students’ attention.
- Models and demonstrates behaviors that help students achieve better understanding.
- Asks students to share their thinking in a focused way.
- Prompts students to listen to and respond to one another rather than always being the center of the conversation.
- Keeps the conversation grounded in the text.
- Turns the conversation back to students, asking for deeper thinking.
- Requires students to be accountable for their comments, asking for more than opinion and asking for evidence from the text or personal experience.
- Gives feedback to students on what they are learning and the kinds of thinking they are doing.
- Asks students to self-evaluate their conversation about the text.

You will find that interactive read-aloud and literature discussion provide rich opportunities for every student to expand background knowledge, experience age-appropriate and grade-appropriate text, and learn a variety of ways to think deeply about an engaging text.
Shared and Performance Reading Continuum

Shared reading and performance reading have many of the same goals as interactive read-aloud, but they go beyond active listening and discussion: Students actually participate in the reading in some way. We define shared reading and performance reading as instructional contexts that involve reading aloud for the pleasure of oneself and others. All forms of performed reading involve:

• Processing print in continuous text.
• Working in a group (usually).
• Using the voice to interpret the meaning of a text.
• Often reading in unison with others, although there may be parts or solos.
• Opportunities to learn more about the reading process.

In Teaching for Comprehending and Fluency: Thinking, Talking, and Writing About Reading, K–8 (Fountas and Pinnell 2006), we described three contexts for shared and performance reading.

1. **Shared reading** usually refers to children’s reading from a common enlarged text, either a large-print book, a chart, or a projected text. Individuals may have their own copies. The teacher leads the group, pointing to words or phrases. Reading is usually in unison, although there are adaptations, such as groups alternating lines or individuals reading some lines.

2. **Choral reading** usually refers to any group of people reading from a common text, which may be printed on a chart, projected on a screen, or provided as individual copies. The text is usually longer and/or more complex than one used for shared reading. The emphasis is on interpreting the text with the voice. Some reading is in unison by the whole group or subgroups, and there may be solos or duets.

3. **Readers theater** usually refers to the enactment of a text in which readers assume individual or group roles. Readers theater is similar to traditional play production, but the text is generally not memorized and props are rarely used. The emphasis is on vocal interpretation. Usually individuals read parts although groups may read some roles. Readers theater scripts are usually constructed from all kinds of texts, not from original plays.

In selecting and using books and other written texts for shared and performance reading, you need to consider some of the same kinds of factors that you would for guided and independent reading; after all, students do need to be able to read and understand them. However, since you will be providing a high level of
support and students will be reading texts many times, it is not necessary to use
the A–Z levels (see Guided Reading continuum in this book, pages 106–158). In-
stead, you will want to consider features such as interesting language, rhyme and
rhythm, language play, poetic language, appeal to students, and other aspects of
texts that make them ideal for performance.

Characteristics of Texts
In thinking about texts for shared and performance reading, we again consider
the ten text factors. As with interactive read-alouds, you must consider if the vo-
cabulary in the text is understandable to listeners, but word solving is a relatively
minor consideration. Children can easily pronounce and appreciate words like
fantabulous or humongous in humorous poems or words like somber or ponderous
from readers theater once they are taught the meaning of the words. Descrip-
tions of all ten text characteristics, in terms of shared and performance reading,
follow.

1. **Genre**. We have listed a variety of types of texts that are appropriate at each
grade level. We include poetry, songs, and chants. For the most part, you will want
to use the full range of genres at every grade level, but be selective about the par-
ticular examples you choose. Use both fiction and nonfiction texts for shared and
performance reading. Often, a narrative text is turned into a play or poetic text to
create readers theater scripts.

2. **Text Structure**. The structure of a text refers to the way it is organized. Fic-
tion texts are generally organized in a narrative structure, with a problem and
a sequence of events that lead to the resolution of the problem. Younger chil-
dren generally read short texts that have humor or rhyme. Traditional tales are an
excellent resource. When longer texts are turned into plays or readers theater
scripts, they are generally shortened: students present a particular moment in
time, perform the essence of the plot, or show the main character’s feelings or
point of view. Nonfiction texts may also be narrative; biographies, for example, are
relatively easy to turn into readers theater scripts. But most informational texts are
organized categorically by subtopic with underlying structures such as descrip-
tion; temporal sequence; comparison and contrast; cause and effect; and problem
and solution. Often these structures are used in combination. Through shared or
performance reading, your students can highlight some of the underlying struc-
tures and they will enjoy turning some content area learning (for example, a text
on environmental pollution or a period of history) into readers theater.

3. **Content**. The subject matter of the text should be accessible and interesting
to listeners. Content is helpful to listeners when they already have some prior
knowledge to bring to understanding new information. Through shared and
performance reading, particularly of biography, students can think deeply about many different topics.

4. Themes and Ideas. The major ideas of the material you choose for shared and performance reading should be appropriate for all students’ age and experience. Students can extend their understanding of the themes and ideas as they discuss how texts should be read or performed.

5. Language and Literary Features. The way the writer uses language creates the literary quality of a text. It is important to select texts that students can understand in terms of language and literary features. Shared reading and performance reading provide an ideal setting in which to “try on” different interpretations of a text through changes in the voice.

6. Sentence Complexity. The structure of the sentences—their length and the number of embedded phrases and clauses—is another key factor. Through the primary and elementary grades, students can generally understand sentences that are more complex than those they can read. Practicing sentences for performance helps students internalize various sentence structures.

7. Vocabulary. Vocabulary refers to the words that an individual knows and understands in both oral and written language. Working with a text in shared or performance reading, students have the opportunity to meet new words many times and thus expand their vocabularies. It is important that students understand the text used in shared and performance reading; they will not enjoy the activity if they do not understand the words.

8. Words. You will be offering high support for word solving, and students will be reading selections several times, so words are not a major factor in text selection. You will want to choose texts with words that students understand and can pronounce with your help. Shared and performance reading offers an excellent context within which students can learn more about how words work. As repeated readings make a text familiar, students will gradually add to the core of high-frequency words they know. They will also begin to notice beginnings, endings, and other parts of words and make connections between words.

9. Illustrations. Many texts used as a basis for shared and performance reading are full of illustrations that help students interpret them. Along with the teacher support inherent in shared and performance reading, illustrations enable young children to read higher-level big books together. For older students, too, performance reading may be based on picture books (fiction and nonfiction) that have illustrations contributing to the mood. Sometimes, students may perform their reading in conjunction with a slide show of some important illustrations. For some texts, however, illustrations may not be a factor. Graphics in
informational texts, for example, would be unusual to include in shared and performance reading.

10. Book and Print Features. When younger students are engaged in shared reading of enlarged texts (books and poems), print features such as length, layout, clarity of font, and number of lines on a page affect their ability to participate. In general, children can read more complex texts in shared reading than they can in guided or independent reading, but you will not want to overload them. Even older readers might find it difficult to read a long and complex poem in unison from an overhead transparency. We address book and print features for shared reading in kindergarten through grade two. After that, book and print features are not so important. In addition, readers’ tools like the table of contents, glossary, pronunciation guide, indexes, sidebars, and headings may be included in some big books used for shared reading.

Curriculum Goals

We have stated curriculum goals in terms of behaviors and understandings to notice, teach, and support at each level. These are further divided into evidence that the reader is thinking within, beyond, or about the text.

• Within the Text. To effectively and efficiently process a text and derive the literal meaning, readers must solve the words and monitor and self-correct their reading. During shared and performance reading, students need to follow what the text is saying, picking up important information that will help them reflect that meaning in their voices. They must self-monitor their own understanding, remember information in summary form, and sometimes adjust their reading to reflect the genre. One of the major benefits of shared and performance reading is that students are producing a fluent, phrased, and expressive oral reading of a text. This instructional setting provides a great deal of practice and an authentic reason to read aloud (not simply to let the teacher check on you!).

• Beyond the Text. Readers make predictions and connections based on previous knowledge and their own lives. They also make connections between and among texts. They bring background knowledge to the reading of a text, synthesize new information by incorporating it into their own understandings, and think about what the writer has not stated but implied. Readers may infer the feelings and motivations of characters in fiction texts or the implications of the writer’s statements in nonfiction. To reflect interpretation with their voices, readers must actively seek meaning and even consider alternative meanings for a text. Shared reading, choral reading, and readers theater all provide many opportunities for thinking beyond the text. To read with a character’s voice, for example, you need to think deeply about how that character feels.
• **About the Text.** Readers think analytically about the text as an object, noticing and appreciating elements of the writer’s craft, such as use of language, characterization, organization, and structure. Reading like a writer helps students notice aspects of craft and more fully enjoy a text, sometimes prompting them to revisit it. Readers also think critically about texts, evaluating the quality and considering the writer’s accuracy or objectivity. Texts are selected and created for shared and performance reading based on the quality of the writing. When students perform parts of a text or a readers theater script made from a text, they have the opportunity to get to know the language. It is an opportunity to internalize and sometimes even memorize some high-quality language. Shared and performance reading enable you to build a large repertoire of shared texts that can be revisited often to notice more about the writer’s craft.

**Using the Continuum**

The continuum does not reference specific texts, topics, or content areas. You will apply the continuum’s goals in connection with your district or state requirements. You can use this guide to set overall curriculum goals for grades K–2, or you can refer to it as you plan for shared and performance reading.
Students’ written responses to what they have read provide evidence of their thinking. When we examine writing in response to reading, we can make hypotheses about how well readers have understood a text. But there are more reasons to make writing an integral part of your reading instruction. Through writing—and drawing as well—readers can express and expand their thinking and improve their ability to reflect on a text. They can also communicate their thinking about texts to a variety of audiences for a variety of purposes. By helping children examine effective examples of writing about reading, they learn the characteristics of each form and can “try it out” for themselves. The models serve as mentor “texts” that children can refer to as they experiment with different types of writing.

Young children can learn how to write about texts through shared or interactive writing:

• **In shared writing**, the teacher and students compose a text together. The teacher is the scribe. Often, especially with younger children, the teacher works on a chart displayed on an easel. Children participate in the composition of the text, word by word, and reread it many times. Sometimes the teacher asks children to say the word slowly as they think about how a word is spelled. At other times, the teacher (with student input) writes a word quickly on the chart. The text becomes a model, example, or reference for student writing and discussion. (See McCarrier, Fountas, and Pinnell 2000.)

• **Interactive writing,** an approach for use with young children, is identical to and proceeds in the same way as shared writing, with one exception: Occasionally the teacher, while making teaching points that help children attend to various features of letters and words, will invite a student to come up to the easel and contribute a letter, a word, or part of a word. (See McCarrier, Fountas, and Pinnell 2000.)

After older students are confident with a form of writing through the analysis of effective examples, whole- or small-group discussion can support their independent writing about reading. Discussion reminds writers of key characteristics of the text and the author’s craft.

In this continuum, we describe many different forms of writing about reading in four categories: functional writing, narrative writing, informational writing, and poetic writing. The goal is for children to read many examples in each category, identify the specific characteristics, and have opportunities to apply their understandings in independent writing.
**Functional Writing**

*Functional writing* is undertaken for communication or to “get a job done.” During a literacy block, a great deal of functional writing takes place around reading. Students make notes to themselves about written texts that they can use as a basis for an oral discussion or presentation or to support writing of more extended pieces. Or they may write notes or letters to others to communicate their thinking. A key tool for learning in grade two is the reader’s notebook, in which students reflect on their reading in various forms, including dialogue letters that are answered by the teacher.

Second graders can begin with a simple blank notebook. You provide mini-lessons to help them understand the various kinds of functional writing they can place in the notebook. (See Fountas and Pinnell 2001 and 2006.) Some examples of functional writing about reading are:

- notes and sketches—words, phrases, or sketches on sticky notes or in a notebook
- “short-writes”—a few sentences or paragraphs produced quickly in a notebook or a large sticky note that is then placed in a notebook
- graphic organizers—words, phrases, sketches, or sentences
- letters—letters written to other readers or to the author or illustrator of a book
- diary entries—an entry or series of entries in a journal or diary from the perspective of a biographical subject or character

**Narrative Writing**

*Narrative writing* tells a story. Students’ narrative writing about reading might retell some or all of a plot or recount significant events in the life of a biographical subject. Or students might tell about an experience of their own that is similar to the one in a text or has a similar theme. Some examples of narrative writing about reading are:

- summary—a few sentences that tell the most important information in a text
- cartoon/storyboarding—a succession of graphics or stick figures that present a story or information

**Informational Writing**

*Informational writing* organizes facts into a coherent whole. To compose an informational piece, the writer organizes data into categories and may use underlying structures such as description, comparison and contrast, cause and
effect; time sequence; and problem and solution. Some examples of informational writing about reading are:

- author study—a piece of writing that provides information about an author and his or her craft
- illustrator study—a piece of writing that provides information on an illustrator
- interview (with an author or expert)—a series of questions and responses designed to provide information about an author or expert on a topic
- “how-to” book—an explanation of how something is made or done
- “all about” book—factual information presented in an organized way

Poetic Writing

Poetic writing entails carefully selecting and arranging words to convey meaning in ways that evoke feelings and sensory images. Poetry condenses meaning into short language groupings. It lends itself to repeated readings and to being read aloud for the pleasure of listening to the language. Poetic writing about reading includes poetry written in response to a prose text or to reflect or respond to a poem.

Using the Writing About Reading Continuum

All the genres and forms for writing about reading will give you evidence of how students are thinking and will help them become more reflective about their reading. The continuum is organized by grade. First, we list the genres and forms that are appropriate for students to be writing at the grade level. Then we specify behaviors and understandings to teach, notice, and support as students think within, beyond, and about a text. (Notice that you can find evidence in both illustrations and writing.) Remember that genres and forms are demonstrated and coconstructed through the use of interactive and shared writing before students are expected to produce them independently as assignments. After experiencing the genres or forms several times with group support, students will be able to produce them on their own. Gradually, they will build up a repertoire of ways of writing about reading that they can select from according to their purpose.
The classroom, from kindergarten through middle school, is a place where writers grow. They learn by engaging in the writing process with the expert help of the teacher and with the support of their peers. Writing is multifaceted in that it orchestrates thinking, language, and mechanics. The writing process can be described as a series of steps (getting an idea, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing), but it is in fact a recursive process in which all these things are happening simultaneously.

Writing is a basic tool for learning as well as for communicating with others. In our schools, students are expected to write in every subject area. We want them to become individuals who can use many types of writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences throughout their lives. Elsewhere we have written that “the writing terrain spreads out in many directions, real and imaginary, and encompasses in-depth intellectual investigations of biology, geology, history, anthropology, and other fields” (Fountas and Pinnell 2001b, 423).

We want to help students develop a basic knowledge of the writing process and to know how to vary the process for different genres and purposes. Even young children can produce simple publications; as they write year after year, they engage in the same basic process but at more sophisticated levels. Their range becomes broader and their publications more complex.

Almost every genre listed in the continuum is first demonstrated in a read-aloud or with examples of shared, interactive, or modeled writing. Young children will have a shared or group experience in all genres they are eventually expected to produce independently. Even young children can have this important experience through shared, interactive, or modeled writing:

- **In shared writing,** the teacher and students compose a text together. The teacher is the scribe. Often, especially with very young children, the teacher works on a chart displayed on an easel. Children contribute each word of the composition and reread it many times. Sometimes the teacher asks the children to say the word slowly as they think how a word is spelled. At other times the teacher (with student input) writes the composition on the chart more quickly. The text becomes a model, example, or reference for student writing and discussion.

- **Interactive writing** is identical to and proceeds in the same way as shared writing, with one exception: occasionally the teacher, while making teaching points that help children attend to various features of letters and words, will invite a student to come up to the easel and contribute a letter, word, or part of a word.

- **Modeled writing** may be used at every grade level. Here, the teacher demonstrates the process of writing in a particular genre, sometimes thinking aloud.
to reveal what is going on in her or his mind. The teacher may have prepared the piece of writing prior to class but talks through the process with the students.

We believe that a major component in learning to write in a particular genre is to study mentor texts—works of children’s literature, fiction, and nonfiction that you have read and discussed—and we have built the study of mentor texts into every appropriate Selecting Purpose and Genre section. Writers learn from other writers. If students experience several books by an author and illustrator, they soon learn what is special about an Eric Carle book. They start to notice topics, characteristics of illustrations, types of stories, and language. They may record or remember words and language in order to borrow it. As they grow more sophisticated, they understand that writers use other writers as examples and learn from them. They notice what writers do to make their writing effective and begin to use mentor texts as models when planning, revising, and publishing writing. They notice purpose, topic, and genre choice and begin to make those choices for themselves. Students may even participate in formal study of authors to learn about their craft—how they portray characters, use dialogue, and organize information. Graphics and illustrations offer many examples to young writers relative to illustrating their work clearly. Very sophisticated readers and writers are still learning from mentor texts as they seek examples of the treatment of themes or ideas, create dialogue and show character development, and prepare persuasive or critical pieces. Through the process of taking on all of the understandings listed in this continuum, the students realize that published authors can be their mentors.

Additional complexity is introduced into the process of becoming a writer if the learner is an English language learner. The expectations for each grade level of the continuum are the same for students whose first language is and for speakers whose second language is English. The expectations for instruction, however, are different. English language learners will need a greater level of support as they expand their control of oral English and, alongside it, written English. Start where students are, but give them rich opportunities to hear written language read aloud and to talk about concepts and ideas before they are expected to write about them. Interactive writing is an effective tool for helping English language learners begin to compose and construct written text. By composing text collaboratively, with the teacher as scribe to guide the structure and control conventions, students can create their own exemplar texts. Interactive writing offers group support and strong models. As students reread the interactive writing, they internalize conventional English syntactic patterns, relevant vocabulary, and the features of the genre. In individual conferences, teachers can help English language learners rehearse what they want to write and help them expand their ideas. Also
include frequent experiences with shared and performance reading, which in-
volves students in rereading and thinking about the meaning of familiar texts.

This writing continuum is presented in two- or three-year spans, the goals ide-
ally to be achieved by the end of the span:

- Kindergarten and grade one
- Grades two and three
- Grades four and five
- Grades six, seven, and eight

Since learning to write is akin to a spiral, you will see many of the same goals re-
peated across the grades. However, students will be working toward these goals in increasingly sophisticated ways.

In this continuum, we describe writing in four major areas: purpose and genre;
craft; conventions; and process. These four areas of learning apply to all students,
kindergarten through grade eight.

**Purpose and Genre**

The writer has a purpose in mind and selects the genre accordingly. You may want
to tell a story that will communicate a larger meaning; you may want to inform or
entertain; you may want to persuade people to take action on an issue that is im-
portant to you. It is important to recognize that effective writers do not write in a
genre just to practice it. They choose the genre that will best convey the meaning
they intend. Of course, teachers introduce new genres to students so that they can
learn to write in those genres, but the ultimate goal is to establish a repertoire of
genres from which they can choose. It is important to establish the desire to write
in a genre by making it interesting and enjoyable. For instructional purposes, we
have described traditional genres within each purpose category, even as we rec-
ognize that virtually any genre might be used to support a given purpose—an in-
formational friendly letter, for example, or a functional poem.

In the overall continuum, we categorize writing genres under four purposes:
narrative; informational; poetic; and functional. For grades six through eight, we
have added a fifth category, hybrids. Hybrid texts combine genres to support any
chosen purpose. For each genre within these categories, we have two important
sets of information: Understanding the Genre, which reflects key understandings
particular to the genre (what students need to know about the genre); and Writing
in the Genre, which refers to the way the student demonstrates understanding by
taking on the various kinds of writing within the genre (what students do with the
genre). Also for each genre, we list sample forms of writing that can, among others, be part of the writing curriculum.

**Narrative Genres**

A narrative is a story with a beginning, series of events, and an ending. Narratives may be fiction or nonfiction, and they usually tell about important or exciting events from a character’s (or subject’s) life. A narrative can be very simple or highly complex. This continuum encompasses three kinds of narratives: memoir, short fiction, and biography. For each type of text, we describe important understandings and identify specific goals related to writing in that genre.

**Memoir.** Memoir includes personal narrative. We want students to learn the craft and conventions of memoir by writing about their own lives. Very young students begin by sketching, telling, and writing simple stories about their families, friends, and pets. It is important for students to understand from the beginning that they are writing about what they know. In doing so, they will learn to observe their worlds closely, looking for examples that will be true to life. Students develop the ability to write fiction by telling these stories from experience.

Throughout the grades, students continue to write memoir. They learn to write about small moments that capture strong feelings or significant experiences. They begin to understand the more formal notion of memoir as a brief, often intense memory of an event or person. A memoir has an element of reflection and teaches the reader a larger meaning.

**Short fiction.** Students can think of fiction as a short story about an event in the life of a main character that gets across a point. We want them to learn that good fiction reveals something about life, connects with readers, and communicates the deeper meanings of a theme. Short fiction can be realistic fiction or fantasy, contemporary or historical. Younger children may write very simple stories about people or animals; they may retell their own version of an animal fantasy. As they grow more sophisticated, students will undertake such aspects of fiction as characterization and plot development.

**Biography.** Biography is nonfiction but it is usually presented as a narrative. We want students to learn that biography is a true story about a person. Younger writers can tell simple stories about family members or friends; older writers can produce fully documented biographical sketches or profiles of role models or public figures, contemporary or historical. In all cases, the biographer selects a subject for stated reasons and selects events and tells the story in a way that shows readers the writer’s perspective. Writers use craft to make the biography
interesting. It may be fictionalized for interest and readability, but the writer must disclose anything that is not documented.

**Informational Genres**

Informational texts include literary nonfiction, expository nonfiction, and essays.

**Literary nonfiction.** Not all nonfiction writing takes the form of reports or textbooks! Especially in recent years, we have seen the publication of highly engaging and literary short and longer nonfiction. We want students to learn from these mentor texts how to produce interesting, literary nonfiction that focuses on a topic or one aspect of a topic. They learn how to use resources to be sure they have accurate information and how to sustain focus. They also learn that they need to make the writing interesting to readers and help readers learn about the topic in new ways.

**Expository nonfiction.** Throughout our schooling and beyond, the ability to write a feature article or a report is useful and necessary. Students learn that a feature article focuses on one aspect of a topic and that a report includes several aspects of a topic. In both kinds of text, the writer makes statements and backs them up with facts, examples, and other evidence. The writer may seek to persuade readers to take a particular view or take action. (We do not teach this genre to younger writers because of the sophistication it requires.)

**Essay.** An essay is a highly sophisticated, short literary composition in which the author clearly states a point of view. The essay may be analytical, critical, or persuasive. The ability to compose an essay is based on many years not only of writing but also of engaging in critical thinking. Essays are appropriate in the upper elementary grades and middle school.

**Poetic Genres**

Young writers need to learn to understand poetry as a special genre for communicating meaning and describing feelings and sensory images. There are many different forms of poetry: traditional rhymes, songs, and verses; free verse; lyric poetry; narrative poetry; limericks; cinquains; concrete poetry; haiku; “found” poetry; list poems; and formula poems. Once students have a well-established understanding of free verse, you can introduce them to a variety of other forms through mentor texts. Before writing poetry, students need to hear poems read aloud and read poems aloud themselves. This exposure gives students the feel of poetry and lets them gradually internalize the forms it can take. They learn to observe the world closely and to experiment with words and phrases so that they begin to produce poetic language.
Functional Genres
As adults, we use a large range of functional texts every day, ranging from very simple communications to sophisticated letters. The genres that follow are categorized as functional.

Friendly letters. Notes, cards, invitations, email, and friendly letters are written communications that require the writer to provide particular kinds of information and to write in a tone and form that is appropriate.

Formal letters. Business letters and editorials are formal documents written with a particular purpose. They get right to the point, exclude extraneous details, and have required parts.

Lists and procedures. Lists are planning tools that help people accomplish daily tasks; they are also the building blocks of more complicated texts, such as poems and informational pieces. Procedures, like how-to texts and directions, require student writers to think through and clearly explain the steps in a process.

Test writing. Test writing is required in academia. Students must learn that some writing is for the expressed purpose of showing someone else how much you know. They need to analyze a test for the expectations and write to the point.

Writing about reading. Writing about reading, too, is required in school to reflect students’ thinking within, beyond, and about a text they have read. Almost any genre or form can be used to respond to a test. We have provided a complete separate continuum for this important area of literacy.

Hybrids
Hybrid texts, those that combine more than one genre into a coherent whole, serve any purpose the writer chooses. They may engage, inform, persuade, or serve a functional purpose. We have included these at the upper levels only. At their simplest—embedding a friendly letter into an ongoing narrative, for example—they may be manageable for the fluent middle grade writer. More complex forms—parallel explanation and narrative, for example—require deft perspective and style changes that can only be managed by advanced writers.

Craft
The previous section describes the product of writing—what young writers are expected to produce as an outcome. Getting to that product is an educational process and requires attention to skills and strategies in the next three sections: craft, conventions, and the process of writing.
All the previous genres involve crafting an effective piece of writing that is clearly organized and contains well-developed ideas. The writer must use language appropriate for the genre, to include the specific words selected. We want younger students to consider word choice carefully so that the piece conveys precise meaning. Older students will have larger vocabularies, but they can also use tools like a thesaurus. Above all, the writing must have voice—it must reveal the person behind the writing. That means the writing takes on characteristics that reveal the writer’s unique style. Younger children can write with voice if they are expressing feelings or telling about events that are important to them. Voice develops throughout a writer’s career and it is revealed in the way the writer uses every aspect of craft—sentence structure, word choice, language, and punctuation.

The craft section of the continuum states goals for each area. These goals apply in general to all genres, though some are more relevant to some than others. We include the following:

**Organization.** This section addresses the way the writer arranges the information or structures the narrative. It includes the structure of the whole text—beginnings and endings, and the arrangement of ideas.

**Idea development.** Idea development focuses on the way the writer presents and supports the main ideas and themes of the text.

**Language use.** This section describes goals for the way the writer uses sentences, phrases, and expressions to describe events, actions, or information.

**Word choice.** Word choice attends to the particular words the writer selects to convey meaning.

**Voice.** Voice is the individual’s unique style as a writer.

**Conventions**

Knowing and observing the conventions of writing makes it possible to communicate ideas clearly. Substance must be there and so must craft, but without correct spelling, conventional grammar, and punctuation, it will be difficult to get people to value the writing. Of course, great writers often violate some of these conventions, especially in fiction, but they do so for an artistic purpose. The first eight years of the elementary school is the place to establish a firm grasp of the conventions of writing, including:

**Text layout.** Young children must learn the basics of writing words left to right across the page with spaces between them. But even sophisticated writers
must develop the ability to use layout in a way that contributes to and enhances meaning.

Grammar. The grammar of written language is more formal than spoken language. There are rules for how sentences are put together, how parts of speech are used, how verb tense is made consistent, and how paragraphs are formed.

Capitalization. The appropriate use of capital letters makes texts more readable and signals proper nouns and specialized functions (titles, for example).

Punctuation. Punctuation adds meaning to the text, makes it more readable, and signals to the reader the writer’s intentions in terms of using meaningful phrases.

Spelling. Conventional spelling is critical to the presentation of a piece of writing, both in appearance and meaning.

Handwriting and word processing. The writer’s handwriting must be legible. Effective handwriting also increases writing fluency and ease, so the writer can give more attention to the message. For the same reasons, it is important for students to develop rapid, efficient keyboarding skills.

Learning these conventions is a challenging and complex task, one accomplished over many years. We do not want students to devote so much time and energy to conventions that they become fearful writers or do not develop voice. We do want conventions to be an important part of the editing process.

Writing Process

Students learn to write by writing—by engaging in all of the component processes many times. The writing process is recursive; the components take place roughly in order, but at any point in the process the writer can and will use any or all of the components. In this continuum, we describe four key phases in the process: rehearsing and planning, drafting and revising, editing and proofreading, and publishing. In addition, we’ve included two overarching categories that pervade the entire process: sketching and drawing and viewing self as a writer.

Rehearsing and Planning

Rehearsing and planning involves gathering information, trying out ideas, and thinking about some critical aspects of the text, such as purpose and audience, before beginning to write. Of course, a writer will often stop during drafting and gather more information or rethink the purpose after discussing it with others. This area includes curriculum goals for:
Purpose. The writer has a clear purpose for writing the text and this purpose influences genre selection and organization.

Audience. The writer thinks of the audience, which may be known or unknown. It is important even for younger students to think of the audience as all readers of the text—not just the teacher.

Oral language. Writers can generate ideas and try out their ideas through conversation with others.

Gathering seeds. An important tool of the writer is a notebook in which he or she can collect ideas, experiment, sketch, diagram, and freewrite. The writer uses this notebook as a resource for ideas, formats, and techniques.

Content, topic, theme. The content or topic of the piece is selected carefully with interest, purpose, and theme in mind.

Inquiry and research. In preparation for writing informational texts and biography, the writer will often spend an extended time gathering information. This is also true when an individual is writing historical fiction or developing a plot in an unfamiliar setting.

Genre/form. With audience in mind, as well as content or purpose, the writer selects the genre for the piece and the particular form of the genre.

Drafting and Revising
The writer may produce an initial draft and then revise it to make it more effective, but most writers revise while drafting and sometimes also draft more material after revising. There are a limited number of ways to draft and revise a text, and students use them throughout the grades, including:

Producing a draft. The writer writes an initial draft, getting ideas down quickly.

Rereading. The writer rereads to remember what has been written, to assess clarity, and to revise.

Adding information. The writer adds ideas, details, words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or dialogue to a piece of writing to make it more effective.

Deleting information. The writer deletes redundancy, unimportant information, and extraneous details to make the piece clearer.
Reorganizing information. The writer moves information around to make the piece more logical or more interesting.

Changing text. The writer identifies vague parts and provides specificity; works on transitions; or changes words, phrases, and sentences.

Using tools and techniques. The writer acquires a repertoire of tools and techniques for drafting and revising a text.

Understanding the process. The writer actively works on drafting and revising and uses other writers as mentors and peer reviewers.

Editing and Proofreading
Once the content and organization are in place, students may wish to polish selected drafts to prepare them for publication. The editing and proofreading phase focuses on the form of the composition.

Editing for conventions. Over the years, as students acquire knowledge of the conventions, we can expect them to use that knowledge in editing their writing.

Using tools. Students also need to learn the tools that will help them in editing—for example, the dictionary, a thesaurus, and computer technology.

Understanding the process. Students learn when, how, and why to elicit editing help.

Publishing
Writers will produce many final drafts that are shared with their peers, but sometimes they will publish pieces. That means that the piece will have received a final edit and will include all the elements of a published work, including a cover with all the necessary information, typed and laid-out text, and graphics as appropriate. For some students, publishing means reading a piece to peers to celebrate the writing. Taking this final step is important for young writers because it gives them a sense of accomplishment and gives them an opportunity to share their talent with a wider audience. Over time, as they build up many published pieces, they can reflect on their own development as writers.

Sketching and Drawing
Whether used to capture ideas, store quick images to aid recall, visually arrange ideas to clarify structure or information in a draft, or to enhance the effectiveness
of a published work, sketching and drawing support the entire writing process. Goals in this section apply to all phases of the writing process.

**Viewing Self as Writer**

Finally, we need to think of our students as lifelong writers. Developing as a writer means more than producing piece after piece and gradually improving. We want our students to make writing a part of their lives—to see themselves as writers who are constantly observing the world and gathering ideas and information for their writing. They need to become independent, self-motivated writers, consciously entering into their own learning and development. Most of all, they need to be able to seek out mentors so that they can continue to expand their understandings of the possibilities of this craft. In the last section of the continuum, we list goals in this area.
Language is a child’s first and most powerful learning tool. Within all of the instructional contexts that are part of a comprehensive language and literacy curriculum, learning is mediated by oral language. There are numerous references to oral language in every continuum presented in this book. Children reveal their thinking about texts through discussion with others. Their talk is a prelude to writing. They learn how words work through listening to, talking about, and working with them. By listening to texts read aloud, they internalize language that they will use as they talk and write. They learn language by using it for a variety of purposes. So, in a sense, oral communication is not only an integral part of every component of the curriculum but a building block toward future communication. We need to intentionally develop the kind of oral language skills that students need to take them into the future. We have created this continuum to focus on the broader area of communication beyond the printed word. We cannot now know exactly the kinds of communication skills that will be important in 2020 and beyond, but we can equip our students with the foundational competencies in listening, speaking, and technology that will allow them to take advantage of new opportunities for communication. In this continuum, we examine critical curriculum goals in three areas: listening and speaking, presentation, and technology.

**Listening and Speaking**

Students learn by listening and responding to others. Interaction is key to gaining a deeper understanding of texts. Children need the kind of interactive skills that make good conversation possible; they also need to develop the ability to sustain a deeper and more extended discussion of academic content. This area includes:

- **Listening and Understanding.** Students spend a good deal of time in school listening to explanations and directions. They learn by active listening, so it is important that they develop a habit of listening with attention and remembering details. Also, it is important that they listen actively to texts read aloud. Through listening during daily interactive read-alouds, children have the opportunity to internalize the syntactic patterns of written language, to learn how texts work, and to expand vocabulary. You will find specific information related to vocabulary development in the phonics, spelling, and word study continuum (see Word Meaning); however, listening is an important part of the process.

- **Social Interaction.** Social interaction is basic to success on the job as well as a happy personal life. Through conversation, people bond with each other and
get things done. In the elementary and middle school, students develop their ability to interact with others in positive ways. They learn the social conventions that make conversation work.

- **Extended Discussion.** In content areas, social interaction extends to deeper discussion. Discussion is central to learning in all areas, but it is critical to the development of reading comprehension. Through extended discussion, students expand their understanding of texts they have read or heard read aloud. They develop the ability to remember the necessary details of texts and to think beyond and about them. Extended discussion requires knowledge and skill. Students need to be able to sustain a thread of discussion and to listen and respond to others. They need to learn such conventions as getting a turn in the discussion or taking the role of leader. Even young children can begin to learn how to sustain a text discussion and their ability only grows across the years.

- **Content.** It also matters what students talk about. Their ideas must be substantive. They need to be able to explain and describe their thinking, make predictions and inferences, and back up their talk with evidence from texts. Through daily discussion over the years, they learn the art of argument.

Growing competence in listening, social interaction, extended discussion, and content will help students use language as a tool for learning across the curriculum.

**Presentation**

The ability to speak effectively to a group—small or large—is an enormous advantage. Many students are afraid of speaking to a group, largely because of inexperience or even a bad experience. We see performance as a basic skill that needs to be developed across the years. Even young children can talk to the class about their own lives or their writing; they can even prepare illustrations to help them. As students move into the upper elementary grades, they have many tools to help them such as PowerPoint and other presentation tools that enable them to combine media, for example. We describe a continuum of learning in six areas related to presentation: voice, conventions, organization, word choice, ideas and content, and media.

- **Voice.** Here, voice refers to the speaker's personal style. We have all watched gifted speakers who captivate their audience. While we are not expecting every student to become a public speaker, we do hope that each individual can develop ways of speaking that capture the interest and attention of those listening. Speakers learn how to begin in a way that engages the audience and to use voice modulation and gesture in interesting ways.
• **Conventions.** Certain conventions are basic to making effective presentations. For example, the speaker needs to enunciate words clearly, talk at an appropriate volume, and use an effective pace—not too slow and not too fast. Looking directly at the audience and making eye contact is also helpful. With practice, these conventions can become automatic, freeing the speaker to concentrate on the ideas he or she is expressing.

• **Organization.** An effective presentation is well planned and organized. The speaker can organize information in various ways—comparison and contrast or cause and effect, for example. Effective presentations are concise and clear rather than unfocused and random. The speaker needs to keep the audience in mind when planning the organizational structure of a particular presentation.

• **Word Choice.** Effective speakers choose their words carefully both to make an impact on the audience and to communicate meaning clearly. Speakers often need to use specific words related to the content area they are covering, and they may need to define these words for the audience. Speakers can also use more literary language to increase listeners’ interest. Speakers choose their words with the audience in mind; more formal language may be needed in a professional presentation than in an everyday conversation or a discussion.

• **Ideas and Content.** The substance of a presentation is important. Technique is wasted if the ideas and content are not substantive. Effective speakers demonstrate their understanding through the information they have chosen to present. They know how to establish an argument, use persuasive strategies, provide examples, and cite relevant evidence.

• **Media.** Media can be overused, but in general presentations are enhanced by the use of visual displays. For young children, this may mean pictures, drawings, or posters. As their presentations grow more sophisticated, students can make use of a wide array of electronic resources to create multimedia presentations. Speakers may even need to think of presentation in new ways; for example, the creation of interactive nonlinear websites that members of the audience can explore individually is a kind of extended presentation.

**Technology**

Learning to use technology to communicate is an absolute necessity in today’s society. Often, students are much more sophisticated than their teachers are in this area! We need to give careful attention to helping students use their technological skills in the interest of learning and demonstrating what they know. We want them to be comfortable with electronic conversations and learning groups,
to use rapid and efficient keyboarding for word processing, to create websites and multimedia presentations, and to use the Internet as a tool for gathering information. At the same time, it is important that even younger students begin to understand that using the Internet requires caution as well as ethical and responsible behavior.

- **Gathering Information/Research.** Nonprint media from radio and television to the Internet have become primary sources for learning about the world. Providing opportunities to explore and use these media is a critical part of a literacy curriculum. From initial computer awareness at the early grades to sophisticated Web research and data management at the upper grades, technology can play an important role in literacy development.

- **Publishing.** The computer has changed the process of writing in significant ways and has added new ways for students to communicate their messages. Spelling and grammar checkers, cutting and pasting, and access to digital images have made the creation of polished final drafts easier than ever.

Today people rely increasingly on media beyond print-on-paper. We need our students to be as effective with oral, visual, and technological media as they are with books and newspapers. The world is changing, and global communication is more important than ever.
This continuum of learning for phonics, spelling, and word study is derived from lessons we have previously published (Fountas and Pinnell 2003, Fountas and Pinnell 2004). These lessons are based on a detailed continuum specifying principles that learners develop over time. In this book, we present these same understandings in two different ways: as a grade-by-grade continuum and as word work in guided reading. All of the principles are based on the nine areas of learning that we have previously described and summarized here.

**Grade-by-Grade Continuum**

The grade-by-grade phonics, spelling, and word study continuum presents a general guide to the kinds of understandings children will need to acquire by the end of each grade. These understandings are related to the texts that they are expected to read at the appropriate levels. In presenting this grade-by-grade continuum, we are not suggesting that children should be held back because they do not know specific details about letters, sounds, and words. Instead, we are suggesting that specific teaching will be needed to support learners. The continuum can support instruction and extra services.

**Word Work for Guided Reading**

The guided reading continuum contains additional information about phonics, spelling, and word study. Here we have selected principles that have good potential for the word work teachers include within guided reading at a particular text level. At the end of a guided reading lesson, consider including a few minutes of work with letters or words to help readers develop fluency and flexibility in taking words apart. You may demonstrate a principle on chart paper or a white board. Children may write on individual white boards or use magnetic letters to make words and take them apart. The principles in guided reading are stated in terms of the actions teachers may take, but remember they are selected from a larger set. Evaluate them against assessment of your own students and visit the grade-by-grade learning continuum for more goals.

**Nine Areas of Learning**

Each grade level lists principles over which children will have developed control by the end of the school year. Across grades K through eight, the principles, organized into nine broad categories of learning, are related to the levels of text that students are expected to read upon completing that grade. (They are also related to writing in that children use letter-sound relationships, spelling patterns, and
word structure as they spell words while writing meaningful messages. You will find much evidence of learning about phonics as you examine their writing.) The nine areas of learning follow.

**Early Literacy Concepts**

Even before they can read, children begin to develop some awareness of how written language works. For example, early understandings about literacy include knowing that:

- You read the print, not the pictures.
- You turn pages to read and look at the left page first.
- You read left to right and then go back to the left to start a new line.
- Words are groups of letters with a space on either side.
- There is a difference between a word and a letter.
- There are uppercase (or capital) and lowercase letters.
- A letter is always the same and you look at the parts to identify it.
- The first word in a sentence is on the left and the last word is before the ending punctuation mark.
- The first letter in a word is on the left and the last letter is right before the space (or ending punctuation).

More of the understandings listed above are stated in the continuum. Many children enter kindergarten with good knowledge of early literacy concepts. If they do not, explicit and systematic instruction can help them become oriented quickly. While most of these early literacy concepts are not considered phonics, they are basic to the child’s understanding of print and should be mastered early.

**Phonological Awareness**

A key to becoming literate is the ability to hear the sounds in words. Hearing individual sounds allows the learner to connect sounds to letters. Children respond to the sounds of language in a very natural way. They love rhyme, repetition, and rhythm. Young children naturally enjoy and remember nursery rhymes and songs because of the way they sound. This general response to the sounds of language is called phonological awareness. As children become more aware of language, they notice sounds in a more detailed way. Phonemic awareness involves recognizing the individual sounds in words and, eventually, being able to identify, isolate, and
manipulate them. Children with phonemic awareness have an advantage in that being able to hear the sounds allows them to connect sounds with letters.

**Letter Knowledge**

*Letter knowledge* refers to what children need to know about the graphic characters in our alphabet—how the letters look, how to distinguish one from another, how to detect them within continuous text, and how to use them in words. A finite set of twenty-six letters, a capital and a lowercase form of each, is used to indicate all the sounds of the English language (approximately forty-four phonemes). The sounds in the language change as dialect, articulation, and other speech factors vary but all must be connected to letters. Children will also encounter alternative forms of some letters (a and a for example) and will eventually learn to recognize letters in cursive writing. Children need to learn the names and purposes of letters, as well as their distinguishing features (the small differences that help you separate a d from an a, for example). When children can identify letters, they can associate them with sounds, and the alphabetic principle is mastered.

**Letter-Sound Relationships**

The sounds of oral language are related in both simple and complex ways to the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. Learning the connections between letters and sounds is basic to understanding written language. Children tend to learn the regular connections between letters and sounds (b for the first sound in bat) first. But they must also learn that often letters appear together—for example, it is efficient to think of the two sounds at the beginning of black together. Sometimes a single sound like /ch/ is represented by two letters; sometimes a group of letters represents one sound, as in eight for /a/. Children learn to look for and recognize these letter combinations as units, which makes their word solving more efficient.

**Spelling Patterns**

Efficient word solvers look for and find patterns in the way words are constructed. Knowing spelling patterns helps children notice and use larger parts of words, thus making word solving faster and easier. Patterns are also helpful to children in writing words because they can quickly produce the patterns rather than work laboriously with individual sounds and letters. One way to look at word patterns is to examine the way simple words and syllables are put together. In the consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) pattern, the vowel is usually a short (terse) sound, as in tap. In the consonant-vowel-consonant-silent e (CVCe) pattern, the vowel usually has a long (lax) sound. You will not be using this technical language with children, but they can learn to compare words with these patterns.
Phonograms are spelling patterns that represent the sounds of rimes (the last parts of words or syllables within words). They are sometimes called word families. Some examples of rimes are -at, -am, and -ot. When you add the onset (first part of the word or syllable) to a phonogram like -ot, you can make pot, plot, or slot. A word like ransom has two onsets (r- and s-) and two rimes -an and -om). You will not need to teach every phonogram as a separate item. Once children understand that there are patterns and learn how to look for them, they will quickly discover more for themselves.

High-Frequency Words
Knowing a core of high-frequency words is a valuable resource for children as they build their reading and writing processing systems. We can also call these high-utility words because they appear often and can sometimes be used to help in solving other words. Automatically recognizing high-frequency words allows children to concentrate on understanding and on solving new words. In general, children first learn simple words and in the process develop efficient systems for learning more words; the process accelerates. Students continuously add to the core of high-frequency words they know. Lessons devoted to high-frequency words can develop automaticity and help children look more carefully at the features of words.

Word Meaning and Vocabulary
The term vocabulary refers to the words one knows in oral or written language. For comprehension and coherence, students need to know the meaning of the words in the texts they read and write. It is important for them to expand their listening, speaking, reading, and writing vocabularies constantly and to develop a more complex understanding of words they already know (for example, words may have multiple meanings or be used figuratively). Expanding vocabulary means developing categories of words: labels, concept words, synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms. The meaning of a word often varies with the context; accuracy in spelling frequently requires knowing the meaning if you want to write the word. Comprehending words and pronouncing them accurately are also related to knowing word meanings. Knowing many synonyms and antonyms will help students build more powerful systems for connecting and categorizing words.

Word Structure
Words are built according to rules. Looking at the structure of words will help students learn how words are related to one another and how they can be changed by adding letters, letter clusters, and larger word parts. Readers who can break down words into syllables and notice categories of word parts can also apply word-solving strategies efficiently.
An affix is a letter or letters added before a word (in which case it’s called a prefix) or after a word (in which case it’s called a suffix) to change its function and meaning. A base word is a complete word; a root word is the part that may have Greek or Latin origins (such as phon in telephone). It will not be necessary for young children to make these distinctions when they are beginning to learn about simple affixes, but noticing these word parts will help students read and understand words as well as spell them correctly. Word parts that are added to base words signal meaning. For example, they may signal relationships (tall, taller, tallest) or time (work, worked; carry, carried). Principles related to word structure include understanding the meaning and structure of compound words, contractions, plurals, and possessives.

**Word-Solving Actions**

Word solving is related to all of the categories of learning previously described, but we have created an additional category devoted specifically to word solving that focuses on the strategic moves readers and writers make when they use their knowledge of the language system while reading and writing continuous text. These strategies are “in-the-head” actions that are invisible, although we can often infer them from overt behaviors. The principles listed in this section represent readers’ and writers’ ability to use all the information in the continuum.

**The Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study Continuum and Reading**

Word solving is basic to the complex act of reading. When readers can employ a flexible range of strategies for solving words rapidly and efficiently, attention is freed for comprehension. Words solving is fundamental to fluent, phrased reading.

We place the behaviors and understandings included in the phonics, spelling, and word study continuum mainly in the “thinking within the text” category in the twelve systems for strategic actions. At the bottom line, readers must read the words at a high level of accuracy in order to do the kind of thinking necessary to understand the literal meaning of the text. In addition, this continuum focuses on word meanings, or vocabulary. Vocabulary development is an important factor in understanding the meaning of a text and has long been recognized as playing an important role in reading comprehension.

You can use the grade-by-grade phonics continuum as an overall map when you plan your school year. It is useful for planning phonics and vocabulary mini-lessons, which will support children’s word solving in reading, as well as for planning spelling lessons, which will support students’ writing. In addition, this continuum will serve as a good resource in teaching word study strategies during shared and guided reading lessons.
Guided Reading Continuum

The following level-by-level continuum contains detailed descriptions of ways readers are expected to think within, beyond, and about the texts they are processing. We have produced the A–Z continuum to assist teachers who are using a gradient of texts to teach guided reading lessons or other small-group lessons. It may also be helpful as you confer with individual students during independent reading. We include levels A–N here as appropriate to most students in grades K through two. If you need higher levels, please refer to The Continuum of Literacy Learning, Grades 3–8.

Guided reading is a highly effective form of small-group instruction. Based on assessment, the teacher brings together a group of readers who are similar enough in their reading development that they can be taught together. They read independently at about the same level and can take on a new text selected by the teacher that is just a little more challenging. The teacher supports the reading in a way that enables students to read a more challenging text with effective processing, thus expanding their reading powers. The framework of a guided reading lesson is detailed in Figure I–2.

General Aspects of the Continuum

As you use the continuum, there are several important points to keep in mind.

1. The cognitive actions that readers employ while processing print are essentially the same across levels. Readers are simply applying them to successively more demanding levels of text. Beginning readers are sorting out the complex concepts related to using print (left-to-right directionality, word-by-word matching, the relationships between spoken and written language), so their processing is slower and their overt behaviors show us how they are working on print. They are reading texts with familiar topics and very simple, natural language, yet even these texts demand that they understand story lines, think about characters, and engage in more complex thinking such as making predictions.

   For higher-level readers, much of the processing is unconscious. These readers automatically and effortlessly solve large numbers of words, tracking print across complex sentences that they process without explicit attention to the in-the-head actions that are happening. While reading, they focus on the meaning of the text and engage in complex thinking processes (for example, inferring what the writer is implying but not saying, critically examining the ideas in the text, or noticing aspects of the writer’s craft). Yet at times, higher-level readers will need to closely examine a word to solve it or reread it to tease out the meaning of especially complex sentence structures.
All readers are simultaneously employing a wide range of systems of strategic actions while processing print. These include:

- **Solving the words using a flexible range of strategies.** Early readers are just beginning to acquire ways of looking at words, and they work with a few signposts and word features (simple letter-sound relationships and word parts). High-level readers employ a broad and flexible range of word-solving strategies that are largely unconscious, freeing attention for deep thinking.
• **Self-monitoring their reading for accuracy and understanding and self-correcting when necessary.** Beginning readers will overtly display evidence of monitoring and self-correcting while higher-level readers keep this evidence “underground”; but readers are always monitoring, or checking on themselves as they read.

• **Searching for and using information.** Beginning readers will overtly search for information in the letters and words, the pictures, or the sentence structure; they also use their own background knowledge.

• **Remembering information in summary form.** Summary implies the selection and reorganization of important information. Readers constantly summarize information as they read a text, thus forming prior knowledge with which to understand the rest of the text; they also remember this summary information long after reading.

• **Sustaining fluent, phrased reading.** At early levels (A, B, C), readers will be working to match one spoken word to one written word and will usually be pointing crisply at each word to assist the eye and voice in this process; however, even at level C, when dialogue is first presented, they will begin to make their reading sound like talking. As the finger is withdrawn and the eyes take over the process at subsequent levels, children will read increasingly complex texts with appropriate rate, word stress, phrasing, and pausing in a smoothly operating system. In and of itself, fluency is not a stage or level of reading. Readers apply strategies in an integrated way to achieve fluent reading at every level after the early behaviors are in place. Fluency is an important aspect of effective reading.

• **Adjusting reading in order to process a variety of texts.** At all levels, readers may slow down to problem solve words or complex language and resume a normal pace, although at higher levels this process is mostly unobservable. Readers make adjustments as they search for information; they may reread, search graphics or illustrations, go back to specific references in the text, or use specific readers’ tools. At all levels, readers also adjust expectations and ways of reading according to purpose, genre, and previous reading experiences. At early levels, readers have only beginning experiences to draw on, but at more advanced levels, they have rich resources in terms of the knowledge of genre (see Fountas and Pinnell 2006).

• **Making predictions.** At all levels, readers constantly make and confirm or disconfirm predictions. Usually, these predictions are implicit rather than voiced, and they add not only to understanding but also to enjoyment of a text. All readers predict based on the information in the text and their own
• **Synthesizing new information.** At all levels, readers gain new information from the texts they read, although readers who are just beginning to construct a reading process are processing texts on very familiar topics. As they move through successive levels of text, readers encounter much new information, which they incorporate into their own background knowledge.

• **Making connections.** At all levels, readers use their prior knowledge as well as their personal experiences and knowledge of other texts to interpret a text. As they expand their reading experience, they have more information to help them understand every text. At the most advanced levels, readers are required to understand mature and complex ideas and themes that are in most cases beyond their personal experience; yet they can empathize with the human condition, drawing from previous reading.

• **Reading “between the lines” to infer what is not explicitly stated in the text.** To some degree, all texts require inference. At very simple levels, readers may infer characters’ feelings (surprised, happy, sad) or traits (lazy, greedy). But at high levels, readers need to infer constantly to understand both fiction and nonfiction texts.

• **Thinking analytically about a text to notice how it is constructed or how the writer has crafted language.** Thinking analytically about a text means reflecting on it, holding it up for examination, and drawing some conclusions about it. Readers at early levels may comment that the text was funny or exciting; they do not, however, engage in a great deal of analysis, which could be artificial and detract from enjoying the text. More advanced readers will notice more about how the writer (and illustrator when appropriate) has organized the text and crafted the language and this kind of analysis often enhances enjoyment.

• **Thinking critically about a text.** Thinking critically about a text involves complex ways of evaluating it. Beginning readers may simply say what they like or dislike about a text, sometimes being specific about why; but increasingly advanced readers engage in higher-level thinking as they evaluate the quality or authenticity of a text.

2. **Readers are always meeting greater demands at every level because the texts are increasingly challenging.** The categories for these demands may be similar, but the specific challenges are constantly increasing. For example, at many of the lower levels of text, readers are challenged to use phonogram patterns (or
consonant clusters and vowel patterns) to solve one-syllable words. At upper levels, they are challenged to use these same patterns in multisyllable words. In addition, at every level after E readers must use word endings as they take apart words. Word endings change words and add meaning. At lower levels, readers are attending to endings such as -s, -ed, and -ing, but as words become increasingly complex at successive levels, they will encounter endings such as -ment, -ent, -ant, -ible, and -able.

At all levels, readers must identify characters and follow plots; but at lower levels, characters are one-dimensional and plots are a simple series of events. Across the levels, however, readers encounter multiple characters that are highly complex and change over time. Plots have more episodes; subplots are full of complexity.

3. Readers’ knowledge of genres expands over time but also grows in depth within genres. For some texts at very low levels, it is difficult to determine genre. For example, a simple repetitive text may focus on a single topic, such as fruit, with a child presenting an example on each page. The pages could be in just about any order, except that there is often some kind of conclusion at the end. Such a text is organized in a structure characteristic of nonfiction, which helps beginning readers understand information presented in categories, but it is technically fiction because the narrator is not real. At this level, however, it is not important for children to read pure genre categories, but simply to experience and learn about a variety of ways to organize texts.

Moving across the levels of the gradient, however, examples of genres become more precise and varied. At early levels, children read examples of fiction (usually realistic fiction, traditional literature, and simple fantasy) and simple informational texts on single topics. Across the levels, nonfiction texts become more and more complex, offering information on a variety of topics, as well as a range of underlying structures for presentation (description; comparison and contrast; cause and effect; temporal sequence; and problem and solution). These underlying structures appear at all levels after the very beginning ones, but they are combined in increasingly complex ways.

4. At each level, the content load of texts becomes heavier, requiring an increased amount of background knowledge. Content knowledge is a key factor in understanding texts; it includes vocabulary and concepts. Beginning texts are necessarily structured to take advantage of familiar content that most young children know; yet, even some very simple texts may require knowledge of some labels (for example, zoo animals) that are unfamiliar to the children you teach. Success at successive levels will depend not only on study in the content areas but on wide reading of texts that expand the individual’s vocabulary and content knowledge.
5. At each level, the themes and ideas are more mature, requiring readers to consider perspectives and understand cultures beyond their own. Children can connect simple themes and ideas to their own lives, but even at beginning levels they find that their experiences are stretched by realistic stories, simple fantasy, and traditional tales. At levels of increasing complexity, readers are challenged to understand and empathize with characters (and the subjects of biography) who lived in past times or in distant places and who have very different perspectives from the readers’ own. At higher levels, fantasy requires that readers understand completely imaginary worlds. As they meet greater demands across the levels, they must depend on previous reading, as well as on discussions of the themes and ideas.

6. The specific descriptions of thinking within, beyond, and about text do not change dramatically from level to level. As you look at the continuum of text features along the gradient A to Z, you will see only small changes level to level. The gradient represents a gradual increase in the demands of texts on readers. Similarly, the expectations for readers’ thinking change gradually over time as they develop from kindergarten through grade eight. If you look at the demands across two or three levels you will notice only a few changes in expectations. But if you contrast levels like the following, you will find some very clear differences.

- Level A with Level D
- Level E with Level H
- Level I with Level N

The continuum represents progress over time, and if you examine the expectations in the these ranges suggested, you get a picture of the remarkable growth our students make over kindergarten through grade eight, or for primary grades, levels A through N.

Using the Continuum

The guided reading continuum is organized by level, A to N. Each level has several sections.

Section 1: Characteristics of Readers

The first section provides a brief description of what you may find to be generally true of readers at the particular level. For a much more detailed description, see our Leveled Books, K–8: Matching Texts to Readers for Effective Teaching (2005). Remember that all readers are individuals and that individuals vary widely. It is
impossible to create a description that is true of all readers for whom a level is appropriate for independent reading or instruction. In fact, it is inappropriate to refer to any individual as “a level ___ reader”? We level books, not readers. But it is helpful to keep in mind the general expectations of readers at a level so that books may be well selected and appropriate support may be given to individuals and groups.

Section 2: Selecting Texts
This section provides detailed descriptions of texts characteristic of each level. It is organized into ten categories:

1. **Genre/Form.** *Genre* is the type of text and refers to a system by which fiction and nonfiction texts are classified. *Form* is the format in which a genre may be presented. Forms and genres have characteristic features.

2. **Text Structure.** *Structure* is the way the text is organized and presented. The structure of most fiction and biographical texts is *narrative*, arranged primarily in chronological sequence. Factual texts are organized categorically or topically and may have sections with headings. Writers of factual texts use several underlying structural patterns to provide information to readers. The most important are description; chronological sequence; comparison and contrast; cause and effect; and problem and solution. The presence of these structures, especially in combination, can increase the challenge for readers.

3. **Content.** *Content* refers to the subject matter of the text—the concepts that are important to understand. In fiction, content may be related to the setting or to the kinds of problems characters have. In factual texts, content refers to the topic of focus. Content is considered in relation to the prior experience of readers.

4. **Themes and Ideas.** *Themes* are the big ideas that are communicated by the writer. Ideas may be concrete and accessible or complex and abstract. A text may have multiple themes or a main theme and several supporting themes.

5. **Language and Literary Features.** Written language is qualitatively different from spoken language. Fiction writers use dialogue, figurative language, and other kinds of literary structures such as character, setting, and plot. Factual writers use description and technical language. In hybrid texts you may find a wide range of literary language.

6. **Sentence Complexity.** Meaning is mapped onto the syntax of language. Texts with simpler, more natural sentences are easier to process. Sentences with embedded and conjoined clauses make a text more difficult.

7. **Vocabulary.** *Vocabulary* refers to words and their meanings. The more words in a text the reader knows the meaning of, the easier the text will be. The
individual’s reading and writing vocabularies refer to words that he or she understands and can also read or write.

8. Words. This category refers to recognizing and solving the printed words in the text. The challenge in a text partly depends on the number and the difficulty of the words that the reader must solve by recognizing them or decoding them. Having a great many of the same high-frequency words makes a text more accessible to readers.

9. Illustrations. Drawings, paintings, or photographs accompany the text and add meaning and enjoyment. In factual texts, illustrations also include graphics that provide a great deal of information that readers must integrate with the text. Illustrations are an integral part of a high-quality text. Increasingly, fiction texts are including a range of graphics.

10. Book and Print Features. Book and print features are the physical aspects of the text—what readers cope with in terms of length, size, and layout. Book and print features also include tools like the table of contents, glossary, pronunciation guides, indexes, and sidebars.

Studying the text characteristics of books at a given level will provide a good inventory of the challenges readers will meet across that level. Remember that there are a great variety of texts within each level, and that these characteristics apply to what is generally true for texts at the level. For the individual text, some factors may be more important than others in making demands on the readers. Examining these text factors relative to the books you select for guided reading will help in planning introductions that help readers meet the demands of more challenging texts and process them effectively.

Section 3: Demands of the Text—Ways of Thinking

The heart of the guided reading continuum is a description of the expectations for thinking on the part of readers at the level. The descriptions are organized into three larger categories and twelve subcategories, as shown in Figure I–3.

As you work with readers at each level, examine the specific descriptions within categories. This analysis will be helpful with

- Planning introductions to texts. Examine the categories to determine what might be challenging for readers. Frame the introduction to help them engage in particular thinking processes.

- Guiding interactions with individual readers. Observe reading behaviors and converse with students to determine what they are noticing and thinking about. Draw their attention to what they need to know through demonstrating, prompting, or reinforcing actions.
Discussing the meaning of a text after reading the whole text or a part of it. Invite readers to comment on various aspects of the text and to build on one another’s points. Refer to the continuum as you think about the evidence of understanding they are demonstrating through conversation. Guide the discussion when appropriate to help them engage in new ways of thinking.

Making specific teaching points after reading. Based on observation of how the readers process the text, select and demonstrate effective ways of operating on a text in a way that will help readers learn how to do something as readers that they can apply to other texts.

Planning ways to extend the understanding of the text. Plan writing, drawing, or deeper discussion that will support students in engaging in deeper ways of thinking about texts. (See the Writing About Reading Continuum for examples.)

Section 4: Planning Word Work for Guided Reading
In thinking-within-the-text section at each level, a separate section provides suggestions for phonics and word work. Guided reading is intended to be used as
one component of an integrated literacy framework that includes specific lessons on phonics, spelling, and word study. The details of that curriculum—for lessons and independent activities—are presented in the Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study Continuum (see pages 68, 69, 86, 87, 104, and 105) and expanded in Phonics Lessons and Word Study Lessons, K–3 (Fountas and Pinnell 2003, 2004). These lessons are systematic, sequenced, and multilevel in the activities used to help children apply principles, usually as whole-class activities. The goals embedded in guided reading apply the principles during text reading where phonics and word study instruction is most effective.

As they read texts, individuals are always applying phonics principles, and across the gradient they do so on more and more complex words. Word solving includes not only decoding but deriving the meaning of words, as indicated in the Solving Words category in the first column of Figure I–3, Section 3.

In addition, an important component of a guided reading lesson is some brief but focused attention to letters, words, and how they work. This quick letter or word work should address the students’ needs in visual processing. The goal is to build their fluency and flexibility in taking words apart. In this section, you will find a list of suggestions to help you select word study activities that will enable you to tailor instruction on words to the specific demands of the level of text. Make principles related to word solving visible to students through the following types of activities:

- Have students match or sort picture cards to illustrate letter-sound relationships.
- Have students match or sort letters.
- Demonstrate the principle using a white board (or chalkboard) that all students can see. Invite them to read the examples that you present. Change, take away, or add word parts to build flexibility and speed.
- Demonstrate the principle using magnetic letters on a vertical board. Magnetic letters are particularly helpful when demonstrating how to take words apart or change words to make new ones.
- Have students make words, change words, and take apart words using magnetic letters.
- Have students use individual small white boards (or chalkboards) to write and change words to demonstrate the principles. (Each student can have a small eraser or an old sock on one hand so that changes can be made quickly.)
- Give students individual word cards for instant word recognition.
- Ask students to sort word cards into categories to illustrate a principle.
• Have students match word cards to illustrate a principle.

• Make word webs to illustrate the connections and relationships between words.

As you plan, conduct, and reflect on guided reading lessons at the various levels, move to the appropriate level and note what your students already know and do well and what they need to be able to do so that your introduction, interactions, and teaching points can be more specific to their needs at any given point in time.
Grade 1

- Interactive Read-Aloud and Literature Discussion
- Shared and Performance Reading
- Writing About Reading
- Writing
- Oral, Visual, and Technological Communication
- Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study
Selecting Genres and Forms

Genres and forms for writing about reading are demonstrated through interactive, shared, or modeled writing, often with close attention to mentor texts. Children learn how to respond to reading in different forms and for a variety of purposes and audiences. After they learn about the forms in a supported experience, they use them independently as they respond to books they read.

**Functional Writing**
- Sketches or drawings that reflect content of a text
- Interesting words or phrases from a text
- Short sentences responding to a text (for example, stating a prediction, an opinion, or an interesting aspect of the text)
- Lists to support memory (characters, events in a story)
- Simple charts (graphic organizers) to show comparison or sequence
- Letters to other readers or to authors and illustrators (including dialogue letters in a reader’s notebook)
- Labels for photographs or any kind of drawing
- Written directions (sometimes with drawings) that show a simple sequence of actions based on a text

**Informational Writing**
- List of facts from a text
- Short sentences and/or drawings reporting some interesting information from a text
- Summaries of information learned with headings to show sections
- One or two simple sentences with information about an author or illustrator
- Representations (through writing and drawing) of a sequence of actions or directions from a text
- Labeling of drawings that represent interesting information from a text

**Narrative Writing**
- Simple statements telling the sequence of events
- Drawings showing the sequence of events in a text (sometimes with speech bubbles to show dialogue)
- Simple statements summarizing a text
- Innovations on known texts (for example, new endings or similar plots with different characters)
### Selecting Goals

**Behaviors and Understandings to Notice, Teach, and Support**

#### Thinking within the Text
- Write short sentences to report or summarize important details from a text.
- Represent a character through drawing or writing.
- Represent a sequence of events through drawing (often with labels or legends).
- Notice and sometimes use new words from a text.
- Notice and sometimes use new words from a text.
- Tell important information from a story.
- Tell important information from a story.
- Use text as a resource for words, phrases, ideas.
- Remember information from a text to produce lists, simple sequence of actions, and directions.
- Use the names of authors and illustrators.

#### Thinking beyond the Text
- Reflect both prior knowledge and new knowledge from the text.
- Predict what will happen next in a text or what a character will do.
- Infer how a character feels.
- Reflect what a character is really like.
- Express opinions about stories or poems.
- Form innovations on very familiar texts.
- Compose innovations on a text by changing ending, series of events, the characters, or the setting.
- List or write sentences and opinions about new information learned from a text.
- Write or draw about something in the reader’s own life when prompted by a text.

#### Thinking about the Text
- Create tests that have some of the characteristics of published texts (cover, title, author, illustrator, illustrations, beginning, ending, events in a sequence, about the author page).
- Sometimes borrow the style or some words from a writer.
- Express opinions about a story or poem.
- Notice the way a test is organized and sometimes apply organization to writing (for example, sequence of events or established sequence such as numbers or days of the week).
- Recognize and use some aspects of text structure (for example, beginning and ending).
- Differentiate between informational and fiction texts.
- Notice and sometimes use interesting language from a text.
- Use specific vocabulary to write about texts (author, illustrator, cover, title character, problem, events).
- Produce some simple graphic representations of a story (for example, story map or timeline).