



The banner features a circular photo of Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell on the left. To their right is the text 'Fountas & Pinnell LEVELED BOOKS WEBSITE'. Further right is the 'F&P Text Level Gradient' logo, which includes an icon of an open book and the text 'Officially Leveled by Fountas & Pinnell'. To the right of the logo is the handwritten-style text 'The official source for books leveled by Fountas & Pinnell' and social media icons for Twitter and Facebook. At the bottom of the banner, navigation links are provided: 'PUBLISHERS, CLICK HERE »', 'HOME | ABOUT FOUNTAS & PINNELL | ABOUT LEVELED TEXTS | SUBSCRIBE | LOGIN'.

About Leveled Texts

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The F&P Text Level Gradient™

The F&P Text Level Gradient™ was first introduced in [Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children](#) (1996), establishing Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell as the leading voices in the area of guided reading instruction.

The publications of [The Continuum of Literacy Learning](#), the [Benchmark Assessment System 1 and 2](#), and the [Leveled Literacy Intervention Systems](#) are the result of over two decades of research and practical work with teachers. All of Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell's work references their text leveling system—The F&P Text Level Gradient™—often referred to as Guided Reading Levels or F&P Levels.

Based on their work in Reading Recovery® and other comprehensive approaches that involved high impact interventions for struggling readers, Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell knew that it was essential to match books to readers and to provide differentiated instruction through working with small groups in reading. They teamed up with Heinemann to write [Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Students](#) in 1996, a focused professional book that offered practical advice and discussions of research-based practice in this area.

For many years Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell had been using a valuable tool—the gradient of text from level A to Z+ (The F&P Text Level Gradient™)—a tool created with teams of teachers in school districts almost thirty years ago. Fountas and Pinnell refined their tool and published it for the first time in [Guided Reading](#), and continued to explore and refine the nuances that made one book easier or harder for readers. Thinking across the gradient from A to Z provided a picture of the development of systems of strategic actions over time, and they used this picture to guide the observation of precise reading behaviors and the teaching that would lead each reader forward.

Fountas and Pinnell analyzed in great detail the text characteristics of fiction and nonfiction books at every level of the A to Z+ gradient to understand the demands of each level on the developing reader.

Much of this work had been presented in [Leveled Books K-8: Matching Texts to Readers for Effective Teaching](#), but they continued to refine it. The most challenging task was to think about what the reader needs to be able to do at each level to read with accuracy, understanding, and fluency. Fountas and Pinnell decided to write about specific behaviors and understandings so that teachers could easily notice, teach for and support learners at each level from A to Z+. They developed an outline of twelve systems of strategic actions to use during guided reading instruction, which was then published in the Guided Reading section of [The Continuum of Literacy Learning](#) in 2007.

Fountas and Pinnell's products and teachings are rooted in the work of Marie Clay whose meticulous study of the complexity of the reading process, through detailed coding of thousands of readings, showed that when a text is too difficult for the child the process breaks down and the child does not develop inner control of effective actions for processing texts. When the text poses enough challenge, but not too much, the child has opportunities with effective, explicit teaching to build his network of effective problem solving actions. Fountas and Pinnell's goal is to support the child's development of self-initiating actions he will be able to apply to a range of texts of similar difficulty. With daily teaching, the teacher helps the child climb the ladder of text difficulty with success. The goal of guided reading is to bring the child to the level of complex texts appropriate for the grade, in doing so, teaching must begin with where the child is able to engage with some success, so that there is a point of contact, thereby engaging the child's development of a self-extending system for processing texts.

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What is Guided Reading?

Guided reading is a teaching approach designed to help individual readers build an effective system for processing a variety of increasingly challenging texts over time.

Guided reading is not an exercise to practice reading skills. It is research-based, professionally energized, highly targeted, scaffolded reading instruction that propels all students toward confident, independent reading of high quality grade level books across a diverse array of literature and informational genres. Reading well means reading with deep, high quality comprehension and gaining maximum insight or knowledge from each source.

Using benchmark assessments or other systematic observation, the instructional reading level of each student is determined. The teacher forms a temporary group of students that are alike enough in their development of a reading process that it makes sense to teach them together for a period of time. In selecting a text for the group, the teacher uses the level designation; thinks about the strengths, needs, and background knowledge of the group; and analyzes the individual text for opportunities to support students' successful engagement with the meaning, language, and print of the text. The teacher uses the text to help the children expand what they know how to do as readers.

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The Role of Text in the Age of the Common Core State Standards

The *Eight Components of Guided Reading* (2010) align with the key tenets of the Common Core State Standards:

1. Complex, high level reading comprehension is the goal of guided reading instruction.
2. Guided reading centers on a sequence of high quality texts that support individual progress on a scale of spiraling text difficulty.
3. Guided reading lessons increase the volume of independent reading that students do; the goal always is confident, capable independent readers.
4. Guided reading provides explicit instruction in accurate, fluent reading.
5. Guiding reading lessons provide daily opportunities to expand academic vocabulary through reading, writing, conversation, and explicit instruction.
6. Guided reading lessons include teaching that expands students' ability to apply the concepts of print, phonological awareness, access to rich vocabulary, and accurate, fluent reading to the processing of print.
7. Guided reading lessons invite students to write about reading.
8. Guided reading lessons create engagement in and motivation for reading.

In addition, an important key feature of the Common Core State Standards is to provide students with a grade-by-grade staircase of increasing text complexity and steady growth of comprehension.

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Fountas and Pinnell's goal is to support the child's development of self-initiating actions he will be able to apply to a range of texts of similar difficulty. With daily teaching, the teacher helps the child climb the ladder of text difficulty with success. When the text poses enough challenge, but not too much, the child has opportunities with effective, explicit teaching to build his network of effective problem solving actions.

There are several approaches to determining the level of complexity of a text. Lexile takes one approach by measuring text complexity with a computer algorithm that measures sentence length, syllables, and word frequency. Fountas and Pinnell take a different approach to determining text difficulty, which includes the length of sentences, length of words, and complexity of letter-sound patterns, and many other characteristics. The levels in the F&P Text Level Gradient™ are based on ten text factors named in several of the Fountas & Pinnell books. The F&P Text Level Gradient™ evaluates: Genre/Form, Text Structure, Content, Themes and Ideas, Language and Literary, Features, Sentence Complexity, Vocabulary, Words, Illustrations, and Book and Print Features. A student might very well be able to decode texts at several levels higher and so, measured without comprehension assessment, it may look like he is meeting a standard.

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Ten Text Characteristics for Guided Reading

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:** These are 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 known vocabulary words in a text, the easier a text will be. The individual's reading and vocabulary refer to words that she understands.
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 include a range of graphics, including labels, heading, subheadings, sidebars, photos and legends, charts and graphs. After grade one, texts may include graphic texts that communicate information or a story in a sequence of pictures and words.
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, sidebars, and a variety of graphic features in graphic texts that communicate how the text is read.

I.C. Fountas and G.S. Pinnell. 2011. The Continuum of Literacy Learning, Grades PreK-8, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

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