



SNAPSHOT

BRIDGING RESEARCH
TO PRACTICE

TEACHING
THE CODE.
BUILDING
THE READER.

WHAT A READER NEEDS: A GUIDE FOR STRATEGIC PROMPTING

Adapted from Nell K. Duke's "When Young Readers Get Stuck," with additional considerations for multilingual learners.

When a reader gets stuck, first identify the problem the student is trying to solve. The prompt should match the need. Duke's framework distinguishes word identification from comprehension monitoring, vocabulary, and comprehension—an especially important distinction for multilingual learners (Duke, 2020).

BEFORE YOU PROMPT AGAIN

After a plausible decoding attempt, identify what the student is trying to solve: decoding, an unfamiliar English word, pronunciation or articulation, accent variation, or comprehension. Match the prompt to the need.

1. "What is that word?"

GO TO THE PRINT.

- What letters and spelling patterns do you see?
- What sound-spelling relationships do you know?
- Look all the way through the word.
- Blend it. Try the word.

FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

If the difficulty centers on a sound, determine whether the English phoneme is present, absent, or approximated in the student's home language. Provide targeted listening or articulation support when needed; do not automatically assign more phonics practice.

2. "Did I read that word right?"

MONITOR. CHECK. REPAIR.

- Does that sound like a word you know in spoken English?
- Does it fit the sentence?
- If not, return to the word. What else could these letters represent?
- Reread and confirm.

FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Use meaning only after a decoding attempt. If the student decodes accurately but does not know the word in spoken English, use a brief explanation, visual, gesture, or the surrounding context to establish meaning and support comprehension. These supports build meaning; they do not replace attention to print.

3. “I decoded it, but it still doesn’t sound right.”	TRY. CHECK. FLEX. • Acknowledge the reasonable first attempt. • Identify the letters or pattern that could represent another sound. • Try the alternative sound, blend again, and reread. • Use meaning to confirm the new pronunciation. FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS Distinguish decoding from pronunciation and accent variation. If the student decoded the spelling accurately and meaning is intact, do not treat accent variation as a decoding error. If the word is not yet part of the student's oral English vocabulary, say it, establish meaning briefly, and have the student reread it.
4. “What does that word mean?”	BUILD LANGUAGE. • Give a brief, student-friendly explanation. • Use a visual, gesture, quick example, or the surrounding context to clarify meaning. • Connect it to something the student already knows. • Use a cognate or home-language connection when useful. • Have the student hear, say, read, and use the word. FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS Decoding a word and knowing it in English are not the same thing. When decoding is accurate but the word is unfamiliar, visuals and context can build meaning and support comprehension. Connect the printed form to meaning without turning the phonics lesson into an extended vocabulary lesson.
5. “What does the text mean?”	BUILD COMPREHENSION AND KNOWLEDGE. • Reread the relevant sentence or section. • Talk about the idea. • Clarify important language. • Connect the text to what the student already knows. • Keep reading to gather information and build understanding. FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS Consider whether the difficulty reflects decoding, language comprehension, unfamiliar vocabulary, syntax, text structure, or needed background knowledge. Provide the language or knowledge support the student needs to keep making meaning.