

Choosing Science of Reading Professional Development

An Educator's Guide to Evaluating PD, Courses, and Literacy Coaching

The Science of Reading has transformed how we understand literacy instruction — but not all professional development is created equal. Whether you're choosing an online course, seeking a literacy coach, or evaluating a PD provider, this guide will help you identify training that is evidence-based, practical, and aligned with structured literacy.

Evaluating an Online Course

- Rooted in research — Content references the National Reading Panel, Scarborough's Reading Rope, the Simple View of Reading, or Ehri's phases of word reading
- Structured and sequential — Lessons follow a logical scope and sequence, not a random collection of tips or activities
- Explicit phonics focus — The course teaches how to deliver systematic phonics, phonemic awareness, and decoding instruction — not just why it matters
- Practical application — Includes modeling, lesson demos, downloadable resources, or classroom-ready tools you can use immediately
- Qualified instructor — The creator holds credentials in structured literacy, reading science, or Orton-Gillingham-based methodology

Choosing a Literacy Coach or Mentor

- ? "What is your approach to reading instruction?"
They should name structured literacy, explicit phonics, and evidence-based practices — not balanced literacy or "a little of everything."
- ? "How do you support teachers in the classroom?"
Look for modeling, co-teaching, observation with feedback, and data analysis — not just handing out worksheets.
- ? "What assessments do you recommend?"
Expect tools like DIBELS, PAST, phonics inventories, or curriculum-based measures — not running records alone.
- ? "How do you use data to guide coaching?"
A strong coach analyzes student data to inform grouping, intervention, and instructional shifts.
- ? "What is your training and certification?"
Look for LETRS, Orton-Gillingham, Wilson, UFLI training, or a structured literacy credential.

Green Flags — Quality PD Indicators

- ✓ Aligns with the Science of Reading and structured literacy principles
- ✓ Teaches the "how" — explicit routines, lesson structures, and delivery techniques
- ✓ References peer-reviewed research, not just trends or personal philosophy
- ✓ Includes progress monitoring and data-driven decision making
- ✓ Provides ongoing support (coaching, community, follow-up) — not one-and-done PD
- ✓ Addresses all five pillars: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension
- ✓ Offers practice with real student scenarios, not just theory

Red Flags — Signs PD May Not Be Aligned

- ✗ Promotes "balanced literacy" or three-cueing (MSV) as best practice
- ✗ Relies on leveled reading systems (F&P) as the core framework
- ✗ Dismisses phonics as "one size fits all" or "drill and kill"
- ✗ No mention of phonemic awareness, decoding, or encoding instruction
- ✗ Lacks a clear scope and sequence or instructional framework
- ✗ Instructor has no verifiable credentials in reading science or structured literacy
- ✗ Offers only inspiration or motivation without actionable strategies

Remember

You deserve PD that changes your practice, not just checks a box. The best professional development equips you with explicit, systematic strategies you can implement the next day. If a course or coach can't clearly explain how they teach reading — with research to back it up — keep looking. Your growth directly impacts every student who walks through your door.

Ready to Deepen Your Science of Reading Knowledge?

Explore structured literacy courses, coaching, and resources at Learning to Learn, LLC:
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