



# The Beginning Literacy Framework<sup>TM</sup>

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## **Helping Educators:**

- identify, create and modify text for beginning readers
- meet literacy goals of students with significant disabilities in their earliest stages of literacy

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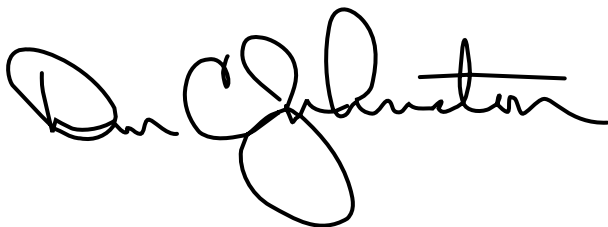
# Don's Vision

I believe that *all* students deserve the opportunities and experiences that foster literacy success. Literacy for every student is not my vision alone, but one that I share with every contributor of this Framework. Because I, myself, did not read until the ninth grade, I understand the disappointment and hardship that accompanies illiteracy. Feeling frustrated and defeated holds students back. This blocks students from learning. The sad result is that students remain below the threshold of success.

You can change that! Some students with significant disabilities may never move into age-level reading, but these students *can* achieve a level of literacy that permits them to participate more productively as a member of society. **"No Child Left Behind" means none—and includes the students that have more profound cognitive and physical disabilities.** It is my life's goal, and the goal of my company, to help educators not only meet those raised expectations, but exceed them!

The Beginning Literacy Framework is revolutionary because it is the first approach designed to help educators assess emergent reading behaviors while plainly outlining the incremental steps that move these beginning readers forward. A number of literacy experts talk about the invisible line that is crossed by regularly developing students when they move from being a non-reader to a reader. It just seems to happen one day, sometimes without any kind of instruction. For our kids though, this doesn't happen as invisibly, or in a single day's time. It can take months and years of experience with printed language—remember this as you're setting student goals.

The Beginning Literacy Framework was developed by experts in literacy, experts in teaching students with significant disabilities to become readers and experts in learning interventions. It will help you identify appropriate reading materials to move students to early conventional reading. I'm excited about collaborating with these experts, and I'm excited about collaborating with you to eliminate illiteracy in our nation—for all students.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don Johnston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

# Charter

We began this project with the goal of creating a framework that would guide the development of electronic books geared toward school-aged students with the most severe multiple disabilities. As we made progress in defining the framework, we began to understand that we had been successful in developing a framework that would address our original goal and a much broader population of school-age students with disabilities who read at beginning levels despite their age or the nature of their disability. Roughly 90% of students with multiple disabilities never learn to read above the 2nd grade level (Koppenhaver & Yoder, 1992). While the numbers are not quite as dramatic for students with milder disabilities, results on the most recent National Assessment for Educational Progress (2000) suggest that approximately 10% of all fourth grade students read at the 2nd grade level or below.

## **The Problem: Moving Beyond Enrichment Literacy**

The fact is that too many students with disabilities get 'stuck' at the enrichment literacy level. This means that they may listen to text for enjoyment, gain information from listening, and participate actively in reading activities, but they are not able to independently read new text that is presented to them. This clearly limits students' ability to be competitive in school and to gain information independently.

- Most popular approaches for leveling early literacy materials contain steps too large to show progress for students with significant disabilities
- Limited availability for materials at the earliest levels
- Materials available are uninteresting and not age-appropriate

## **Lack of Appropriate Materials**

The opportunity to read appropriately-leveled materials is essential to early reading success. Students can learn word-reading and comprehension strategies without materials that are exactly at the right level, but they cannot learn to independently apply those strategies without daily opportunities to read text at their level.

### **Beginning readers need:**

- Multiple types of text as they explore different levels of literacy
- Age-appropriate and engaging materials
- Electronic text to meet accessibility issues
- Literature that fits into the curriculum at their readability level

## The "Buck" Stops Here

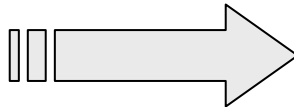
As teachers, we often find that appropriate materials do not exist for our students. We often find we have to modify, create or search for appropriate materials. As an industry, we need to be able to identify and/or create materials that are not only age-appropriate and engaging for students, but that also fit their literacy skill level.

### Students Need:

- **Materials that Match their Ability:** We must understand the literacy skill of the student and match materials to their skill level. Providing materials and instructional support so that the students can advance in their literacy skills is critical.
- **Opportunities to Read:** Making sure electronic materials provide students with opportunities to read is crucial. So often we have the computer read everything to our students. They sometimes need less support and more opportunities to read parts of text, to make up their own stories (pretend to read) while looking at books and opportunities to read conventional text.
- **Standards-based Materials:** Providing materials that are relevant and tied to curricular standards is an increasing need. This impacts student participation, inclusion and accountability.

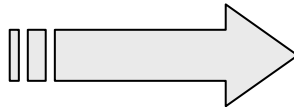
## Summary of Shifts Needed

Provide opportunities for literacy experiences



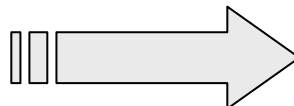
Provide opportunities for literacy experiences AND provide literacy instruction

Instruction focused on emerging skills only



Variety of instructional supports and strategies based on student's level

1 level of text – Enrichment



3 Types of Text – Enrichment, Transitional, Conventional  
Text is matched to the student's literacy goals

# **The Beginning Literacy Framework™— A Framework for Success**

The purpose of this project is to provide you with a framework you can use in identifying and creating appropriately-matched reading materials for your very beginning readers. This framework is the culmination of expertise ranging from leading literacy and assistive technology experts to district curriculum adapters, assistive technology coordinators, speech pathologists, occupational therapists and special education teachers. This diverse group of experts came together in common accord, believing that all students can achieve some degree of literacy and with the goal of helping to create a framework for educators that is easy to understand and easy to use.

## **Levels of Reading: A Definition**

Many organizations and publishers have 'levels' of reading. These publishers all recognize the need to provide individual students with text at the appropriate reading level. Many of these publishers provide as many as twenty levels at a single grade level. Most of these materials start at a level where a student is a conventional reader. There are no levels prior to this—no materials appropriate for students with significant disabilities.

## **One Level—Easy—Is Not Enough**

The Don Johnston Beginning Literacy Framework guides the creation of appropriately-matched reading materials for the beginning reading stages (enrichment through the end of grade 1) without applying the specificity that would restrict its use to a particular reading approach. In other words, the Framework provides three distinct types of text (Enrichment, Transitional and Conventional) where there has historically been one (easy). It clearly articulates the divisions between enrichment and early literacy learning. This framework also provides guidance regarding movement between one text type to the next and can be applied across age levels.

The authors have used literature on early literacy to develop a framework that describes the features of the three text types, plus specific instructional supports that will yield student success at each level.

# Three Text Types

## Enrichment

The text in Enrichment books is often the most lengthy and complex of the three types discussed in this framework.

### **Enrichment Texts are designed to:**

- Develop language
- Build background knowledge
- Support learning concepts about print and the reading experience
- Engage and develop the love of reading

Therefore, text and graphics can be rich. These books are almost always read to the student, but student participation is often encouraged. We never stop reading books to our students. As they develop their literacy skills, books should be chosen that include more complex ideas, concepts, story lines and language patterns. Readers continually expand their vocabulary and build their background knowledge with Enrichment materials. For this reason, we need to continue to provide enrichment materials that are challenging and just beyond the student's readability level.

## Transitional

Planning instruction that supports students in moving from enrichment literacy to conventional literacy is challenging under the best of circumstances. While the reading literature has yet to label this transition, there is no question that there is a period before students are independently reading new materials during which time it is no longer appropriate to describe them as enrichment readers and writers. For most young children without disabilities, this transition happens rapidly. Often parents, teachers, and children aren't quite sure how or when it happened. Suddenly, the child was reading. For students with disabilities, this transition often lasts for an extended period of time. The challenge is to encourage educational teams, parents and students to keep up the effort long enough by providing materials the continue moving the student through the literacy-learning continuum.

### **Transitional Texts are designed to:**

- Provide an increased focus on text, rather than the language and graphics components
- Support students in using the skills and strategies they developed through experiences with enrichment texts and other print-based activities
- Support students in developing simple word-reading strategies

For example, repeated lines are interspersed with pages that have a single word that matches an illustration. In general, these books look easier than Enrichment books in terms of the language, vocabulary and word-reading complexity since students will eventually be reading these books independently.

# Conventional

There are many different terms used to describe readers and writers who are ready for Conventional Text. Essentially, they are using word-based strategies to read both familiar and unfamiliar words in texts. Within this framework, Conventional Texts often appear to be the easiest of the three text types. That is because at this level the focus is on independent application of word reading strategies. To achieve this, the scaffolds of rhyme, rhythm, predictability, and repetition have been minimized, as have the demands of language, text complexity, and sentence-structure diversity.

**Conventional Texts are designed to:**

- Introduce new vocabulary within controlled text
- Foster word recognition and decoding skills
- Remove predictability, helping students apply knowledge about sentence structure

## The Beginning Literacy Framework Overview of Text Features

Enrichment	Transitional	Conventional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Language rich text</li> <li>▪ Variety of sentence patterns</li> <li>▪ Complex sentences are acceptable</li> <li>▪ Blends of language structures</li> <li>▪ Language-rich graphics</li> <li>▪ Detailed graphics that can tell the story and go beyond</li> <li>▪ Opportunities for vocabulary expansion</li> <li>▪ Readability of individual words not critical-interest and engagement are critical</li> <li>▪ Some rhyme, rhythm, repetition and/or predictability that creates engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Simple and consistent sentence structures within a single book</li> <li>▪ High degree of rhyme, rhythm, repetition and/or predictability</li> <li>▪ Mix of text that is beyond the student’s reading level (for engagement) with text that student can read with support</li> <li>▪ Close picture-to-text match when independent text reading is expected</li> <li>▪ Stories can be as long as Enrichment books if text is interspersed with pages for students to independently read (i.e. pages with 1 or 2 predictable words)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Simple text</li> <li>▪ Simple sentence structure</li> <li>▪ Minimal use of pronouns to avoid confusion with referents</li> <li>▪ Consistent sentence structures within a given book</li> <li>▪ Heavy repetition of individual words within a given book</li> <li>▪ Heavy use of high frequency and decodable words</li> <li>▪ Length of story is short</li> <li>▪ Minimal cueing with graphics and other scaffolds.</li> </ul>