The Simple View of Reading and the Year 1 Phonics Check

What is the Simple View of Reading?

The Simple View of Reading model provides teachers with a tool to understand how students are progressing with the two key factors in reading success: **decoding** and **language comprehension**. This understanding means that individual learners can be better supported in differentiated ways to become successful readers.

Reading is a complex cognitive process. It involves reading accurately and with understanding. The Simple View of Reading, developed by Gough and Tunmer in 1986, takes these two factors into consideration. The model is called the Simple View of Reading not because reading is a simple process, but because the model itself is a simple conceptual representation.

Decoding means accurate word recognition. This involves phonological awareness and phonics (see Simple View of Reading and the Big Six, below). Knowing letter–sound correspondences, the English code, and being able to blend sounds to read words are all essential for accurate word decoding.

Language comprehension means the ability to understand spoken language and refers to oral language and vocabulary. Language comprehension involves understanding the meaning of parts of spoken language, including words, phrases and sentences.

Reading comprehension is the product of decoding and language comprehension; decoding is not simply an addition to language comprehension. If one element is missing, reading comprehension cannot occur. The Simple View of Reading ensures decoding and language comprehension are both considered when assessing a student's ability to comprehend written text. If one element is low, then reading comprehension will also be low. If only one element is well-developed (for example, a student can decode words accurately, but their understanding of language is low), then reading comprehension will be deficient.

The Simple View of Reading quadrants

The Simple View of Reading can be plotted on a quadrant chart, with accurate word recognition (decoding) on one axis and language comprehension on the other.
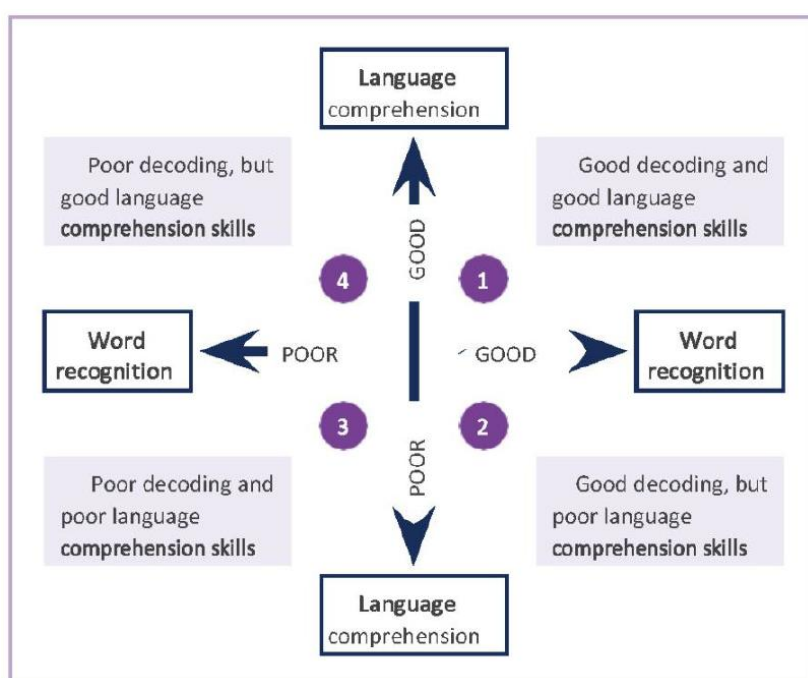
Simple View of Reading quadrant chart (adapted from Rose, 2006)

Students who recognise words quickly and accurately and have a good comprehension of language would be in quadrant 1. Students who have poor decoding skills and poor language comprehension skills would be in quadrant 3.

Word recognition: decoding (the horizontal axis)

The horizontal axis of the Simple View of Reading maps students' ability in word recognition. Word recognition is the process by which a reader recognises or decodes a printed word. If a word is known to a reader and has been mapped to memory (by a process called orthographic mapping), it will be recognised immediately. If a word is not known, it needs to be decoded. Decoding involves the combination of phonological awareness skills and letter–sound correspondence knowledge. As readers decode unknown words, they first identify the letters in a word, then match the corresponding letter-sounds, and finally blend the sounds to arrive at the spoken equivalent for the printed word.

Emerging readers need many opportunities for repetition and practice decoding words with known letter–sound correspondences in order to develop fluency and efficient word-decoding skills. It is only through repeated practice that readers can orthographically map frequently read words to their long-term memory. Skilled readers develop a large bank of orthographically mapped words that can then be quickly retrieved. However, even skilled readers will continue to rely on decoding skills whenever they encounter unfamiliar words.

The Year 1 Phonics Check is a screening tool used to assess students' decoding skills. It allows teachers to map their students' ability along the horizontal axis of the Simple View of Reading quadrant chart. If a student performs well on the Year 1 Phonics Check (fluent decoder), they might be in quadrants 1 or 2.

Language comprehension (the vertical axis)

The vertical axis of the Simple View of Reading maps students' ability in language comprehension. For reading comprehension, not only do students need accurate word recognition skills (decoding), they also need good language comprehension skills.

In considering a student's skills on this axis, teachers need to consider how well a student understands:

- what they are reading
- spoken language.

If a student can read a text accurately, but gives little indication of understanding, they would be placed in quadrant 2. If a student struggles to read and has little indication of understanding, then they would be placed in quadrant 3. And, if a student shows good understanding of a text despite not being able to decode all of the words accurately or they display good understanding when a text is read to them, but not when they read it independently, they would be placed in quadrant 4.

Simple View of Reading and the Big Six

Consider the effectiveness of your systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) instruction. Are you confident that your students have had every opportunity to develop their letter–sound correspondence knowledge and blending skills to read words? Have they had the opportunity to practise applying their knowledge and skills using decodable texts? Also consider how your reading program addresses the Big Six components of reading. Do you address all the components in an integrated way? How often are your students engaged in open-ended, explanatory conversations that help them expand their vocabulary and syntax choices? How often do you read and discuss high-quality children's literature and information texts with your students? These components are key for developing the language capabilities of your students.

Scarborough's (2001) reading rope shows the complexities of learning to read by displaying the elements of word recognition and language comprehension as strands of a rope that need to be woven together through instruction and practice. The reading rope articulates the elements of word recognition (including phonological awareness, decoding and sight recognition) that need to become increasingly automatic and the many components of language comprehension that a reader needs to learn to use strategically.

> Language comprehension includes background concepts, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning and literacy knowledge. Consequently, many synthetic phonics programs recommend spending half the literacy teaching time on developing decoding and accurate word reading, and the other half on reading quality literature to students and discussing it with them. (Parker, 2018)

Through discussion, students become more aware of the structure of the English language, including its grammar and syntax. Students' literacy knowledge is developed as they are read a range of text types, including information texts and narratives, and they hear a much wider range of vocabulary within a book context than they would through everyday conversation. They develop their verbal reasoning skills as they discuss inferences and unpack metaphors. By engaging with text in this integrated way, the Big Six components of oral language and vocabulary can be developed.

Applying the Simple View of Reading to Year 1 Phonics Check results

The placement of students in the Simple View of Reading quadrants can help inform classroom reading instruction design. Teachers could use the Year 1 Phonics Check and other reading skill related data to inform where students sit in the quadrants. Some students will need particular and specific interventions to develop their reading comprehension.

The following questions (adapted from Kilpatrick, 2015) can be used to identify where each student's reading ability lies in the Simple View of Reading quadrant chart:

1. Does the student have a good understanding of spoken language? If I read this passage to this student, would they understand it?

   Yes: quadrant 1 or quadrant 4

   No: quadrant 2 or quadrant 3

2. Can the student quickly and accurately identify (decode) words? Is their oral reading fast and accurate?

   Yes: quadrant 1 or quadrant 2

   No: quadrant 3 or quadrant 4
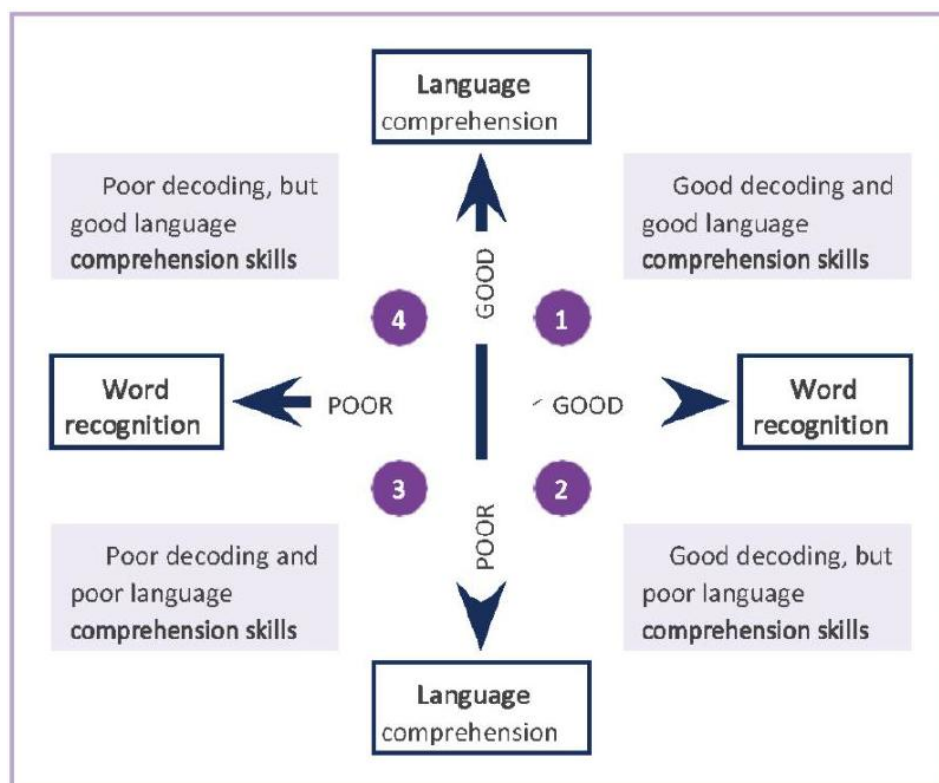
Once you have identified where students sit on the quadrant, you can consider how to address their differentiated learning needs. The following recommendations are provided for each of the quadrants.

Quadrant	Recommended teaching focus
1. Students with good word recognition and good language comprehension skills	• Engage students in activities involving the extended alphabetic code. • Encourage free choice reading in the student's area of interest.
2. Students with good word language recognition but poor language comprehension skills	• Engage the students in oral language activities that involve dialogic talk. • Read high-quality literature and information texts to students, accompanied with discussion incorporating shared, sustained interactions.
3. Students with poor word recognition and poor language comprehension skills	• Assess the effectiveness of your phonics instruction. Do you need to adjust the coverage, frequency or pace of your instruction? Do these students need more time on task? Peer tutoring? Further instruction by the teacher in decoding and language comprehension? • Explore the language comprehension skills that students bring to the classroom. Address any special needs. A referral to an allied health professional may also be required for students experiencing language comprehension difficulties. Continue to read and discuss rich children's literature within the classroom setting as children learn from each other.
4. Students with poor word recognition but good language comprehension skills	• Assess the effectiveness of your phonics instruction. Do you need to adjust the coverage, frequency or pace of your instruction? Do these students require further instruction with the teacher in decoding? These students may require multiple exposures and extra time to consolidate word recognition skills. It is possible that these students may have a specific learning difficulty, such as dyslexia. Seek support and advice from relevant professionals. • Continue to read and discuss rich children's literature and information texts within the classroom setting as children learn from each other.
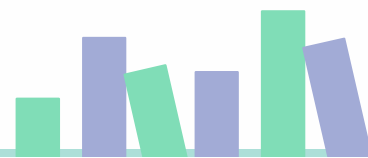
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