Teaching basic skills: Literacy

Literacy – The ability to understand, use, evaluate and reflect (orally and in writing) concepts, feelings, facts and opinions using visual, audio and digital materials across disciplines and contexts.

The development of literacy forms the basis for further learning and linguistic interaction. All teachers are teachers of reading, as better reading and writing skills lead to improvement across subjects. Depending on the context, literacy competence can be developed in the mother tongue, the language of schooling and/or the official language of a country or region.

In the EU:

approximately
1 in 3
tested 15-year-olds fails to understand basic texts

1 in 5
working-age adults struggles with reading and writing

There are
18 million
underachieving pupils and
47.7 million
low-qualified adults (aged 25–64)

Different levels of support in the whole school approach can be used for different types of enhanced literacy acquisition:

- universal approach: all pupils are supported to develop their literacy

- targeted support: in small groups or at individual level, for pupils who are at risk and/or have specific learning needs

INDIVIDUALISED

TARGETED SUPPORT

UNIVERSAL
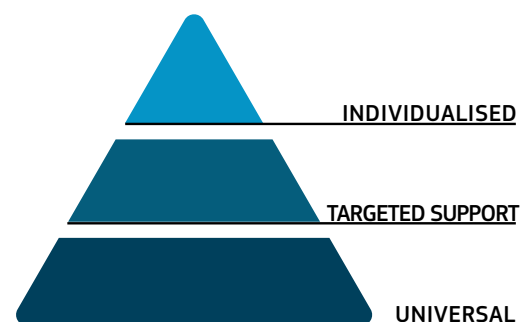
Building a culture of literacy

Every learner can benefit from high-quality, inclusive literacy teaching, learning and assessment that fosters a love for reading and strengthens vocabulary and effective expression. This includes:

- **high-quality early childhood education and care,** which contributes to improved performance in primary and secondary school, enabling the acquisition of diverse cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional benefits

- **balanced reading instruction** in primary schools, where decoding skills are taught alongside comprehension, vocabulary and the enjoyment of texts

- **literacy across the curriculum** in secondary schools, with every teacher equipped to support reading, writing and speaking in their subject (recognising domain-specific vocabulary, text structures and background knowledge)

- **the whole-school approach** helps popularise reading among pupils, especially those who would not usually read – e.g. through running a school book club, organising 'readathons' or taking part in national or international literacy days or initiatives

- **community engagement** to create literacy-rich environments beyond the classroom by collaborating with local events, companies, libraries and museums

- **using digital tools** in age-appropriate ways, such as adaptive reading platforms, interactive reading companions, writing feedback tools, flashcard creators and dialogue simulations to diversify access to texts and feedback

- **building the capacity of teachers** to master versatile classroom strategies to support literacy development, e.g. concept maps, stop-and-jot or think-aloud

Explore further

[Engage families to build a strong classroom reading culture](): Imagine a classroom in which every family, no matter how diverse, shares an appreciation for reading. In this course educators will discover how to inspire and empower families to support pupils' literacy in meaningful and empathetic ways.

[European Authors Day]() celebrates European literature and encourages interest in reading. Schools can take part in reading events in local libraries and bookstores to meet authors or organise their own event.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR STRUGGLING READERS

Struggling readers are a heterogenous group. With sustained encouragement and the right tools, schools can support every child in becoming a confident and capable reader. This involves:

- **access to high-quality early education and care**: foster early language development and foundational skills (especially in disadvantaged contexts)

- **early intervention**: identify speech or language difficulties as early as possible, without stigmatising any child

- **boosting reading confidence and motivation**: give pupils access to a wide selection of texts (comics, short stories, audio) and let them choose what they read (within assignment limits) to give them ownership over their reading

- **peer support, paired reading, small-group discussions**: build confidence in safe environments and celebrate reading milestones together

- **creative and cross-curricular projects**: embed literacy in real-world contexts, so pupils can develop their literacy skills through their topics of interest

- **leading-the-way**: schools share good practices and act as hubs for innovation, promoting school-to-school collaboration

Explore further

[Playful learning for reading](): A child-centred approach in the classroom. Through hands-on practices, this online tutorial will equip educators with the tools to support pupil learning from early childhood through higher education.

PERSONALISED LITERACY PATHWAYS

Certain learners need additional, personalised support to overcome their learning difficulties. This involves:

- **targeted individual support** from trained literacy specialists

- **personalised learning pathways** adapted to pupils' linguistic, cognitive and emotional profiles

- **structured interventions or assistive technologie**s that help pupils improve their reading through different ways from their peers

- **professional development** for educators that is ongoing and research-informed

Explore further

The [Effective practices for literacy teaching]() report by NESET-EENET provides concrete, evidence-based strategies to support struggling readers (p.74–80).

Explore the [European School Education Platform](#) to see how reading, writing, speaking and listening skills enable children and young people to communicate effectively and make sense of the world.

Via eTwinning – the community for schools in Europe – teachers can join featured groups to exchange with peers:

- [literacy, media literacy and critical thinking](#)

- [multilingualism](#)

More learning resources online

- [EU Learning Corner](#) – developing reading and comprehension through materials about the European Union, including topics like citizens' rights, culture and environment (all EU languages)

- [Europeana](#) – reading and writing through exploration of real artifacts (all EU languages)

- [Oxford Owl](#) – building reading comprehension at school and at home (in English)

- [Clilstore.eu](#) – open educational resources for learners and teachers on content and language integrated learning (CLIL) (in all EU languages)

Bibliography

[Action Plan on Basic Skills](#), European Commission, 2025

[Effective Practices for Literacy Teaching](#), NESET–EENEE, 2025

[Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success](#), 2022

[Council Recommendation on establishing a European Child Guarantee](#), 2021

[Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#), 2018