



Using structured literacy approaches with School Journals

This guide explores ways to use School Journals to teach the three strands in phase 2 and phase 3 of the refreshed [English learning area \(ELA\)](#): oral language, reading, and writing.

School Journals support literacy learning across learning areas for students in years 4-8. They can be used to help students apply decoding skills, comprehension strategies, and critical analysis skills to unlock meaning in diverse texts. Many texts in the School Journal series come with audio files and digital versions for flexible use with students.

The School Journal is published in three levels. Level 2 School Journals are designed primarily for students in year 4, level 3 is for years 5 and 6, and level 4 is for years 7 and 8. School Journals have the following characteristics which increase in complexity across levels:

- a collection format with each issue including a variety of genres such as articles, stories, poems, plays, and graphic novels
- increasingly abstract ideas supported by concrete examples
- implicit information that requires students to make inferences
- some unfamiliar words and phrases
- figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, and personification
- sentences that vary in length and structure
- text and visual features that support the ideas and information, for example, subheadings, text boxes, footnotes, glossaries, diagrams, and maps.

Regardless of decoding proficiency, all students need to access year-level texts to develop skills and knowledge alongside their peers such as vocabulary, comprehension, and content knowledge. Ways to remove barriers to texts include providing audio versions, working with small flexible groups to explore the content of the text together, and using print-to-speech software. The refreshed [ELA](#) provides further guidance on noticing, recognising, and responding to students' strengths and needs.

Structured literacy approaches

Applying structured literacy approaches to School Journals is an effective way to build students' essential literacy knowledge and skills. The table below offers ideas for how you could use School Journals to teach elements of structured literacy approaches. These ideas come from the phase 2 progress outcomes and teaching sequence of the refreshed [ELA](#). Use the refreshed [ELA glossary](#) to find the meaning of any unfamiliar words and phrases.

Important note: Some phase 2 students will still be working through a decoding scope and sequence. It is important that they receive explicit teaching in small flexible groups to help them become proficient readers and writers. Detailed diagnostic assessments to find out what students already know and need to learn next will help you to form small flexible groups around specific needs.

Vocabulary

Support students to:

- understand new words in School Journals by giving them student-friendly definitions that connect to the knowledge they already have
- hear, pronounce, read, and write new words correctly
- use knowledge from other learning areas and topics to determine the meaning of words and phrases.

Teaching tip: Before reading a text with students, select 3-5 useful words. Choose abstract and discipline-specific vocabulary. Explicitly teach these words before, during, and after reading. During reading, support students to use morphology and contexts to infer the meaning of new vocabulary.

Morphology

Support students to:

- understand the meanings of word parts and their origins to work out the meaning of unknown words
- use morpheme mapping to break down complex words into their base or root words, prefixes, and suffixes, including words with more than one affix
- describe how affixes change the meaning or function of the base word.

Teaching tip: Create morphology word trees by starting with a base or root word and adding branches for the different affixes you can add to the base or root word. Students can write a brief definition of the new word to show how the meaning has changed next to each branch.

Syntax

Support students to:

- understand the building blocks of a range of sentence structures and types found in texts
- comprehend increasingly sophisticated and complex sentences, especially those that contain adverbial and adjectival phrases and appositives
- identify and explain the purpose of increasingly complex punctuation such as apostrophes, parentheses, and ellipses.

Teaching tip: Write out a range of sentences from the texts you read. Ask students to identify the subject, verb, adverbial phrases, and conjunctions. Discuss how the different parts of the sentence contribute to the meaning.

Fluency

Support students to:

- read year-level texts accurately and expressively at appropriate oral-reading fluency rates for their year-level
- respond to punctuation in texts and group words into phrases for expression, stress, and intonation
- adapt their reading pace to accommodate text complexities
- read a number of slightly different texts on the same topic to improve both comprehension and fluency.

Teaching tip: Fluency teaching and interventions should target reading accuracy, phrasing, and expression. 'Fast' reading is not the aim.



Text structure

Support students to:

- compare and contrast different text forms and genres across a topic
- identify and discuss how authors use text features, language features, and structures in purposeful ways.

Teaching tip: When teaching students about text structures, use a text that they are familiar with so that they can focus on the structure and features of the text rather than its meaning.

Comprehension

Support students to:

- infer from context clues and use morphology to understand challenging words
- read and hold meaning within and between paragraphs, and recognise that each paragraph has a different main idea
- explore how language is used to effect, including the use of figurative and literal language to convey meaning
- monitor and confirm their understanding of texts by annotating, rereading, adjusting their reading rate, asking and answering questions, and visualising
- identify the theme or main idea of a text
- make inferences, using explicit and implicit evidence from the text and prior knowledge
- identify explicit and implicit perspectives and portrayals of groups of people in texts.

Teaching tip: Encourage students to paraphrase sections of a text in their own words before summarising the key points. This helps deepen their understanding and ensures they grasp the main ideas.

Oral language

Support students to:

- use School Journals to build prior knowledge so they can discuss, problem solve, debate, and critically analyse topics and questions with peers
- use sequential, descriptive, and narrative language as they retell stories they have read
- experiment with adjusting tone, volume, and pace as they read texts out loud.

Teaching tip: Record students as they retell stories or read out plays, and then play back the recordings. This allows students to hear their own storytelling and expression, and to identify areas for improvement.

Writing processes

Use the texts in School Journals as writing models. Support students to analyse:

- the features and structures of different text types including stories, poems, reports, explanations, and persuasive texts
- how the author has chosen words and phrases that clearly express actions, feelings, situations, or conditions
- literary techniques such as simile, metaphor, and personification
- how to use a range of sentence structures and types, and how to expand sentences
- the use of punctuation.

Teaching tip: To support students' use of precise words, find model texts that use precise, vivid language. With students, create a poster or table that lists precise nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs they can use in their writing.

Selecting texts for your students

Ongoing, formative assessment of students' decoding skills, comprehension strategies, and critical analysis skills will enable you to notice, recognise, and respond to students' progress. Select texts from School Journals to address students' instructional needs in literacy. For example, when students are:

- developing their critical analysis skills, select texts that offer a range of implicit and explicit perspectives and different sources of information
- learning about language features and devices, select poems and stories that use a range of literary techniques, including imagery, personification, figurative language, alliteration, and idioms
- building their vocabulary, select increasingly complex texts that provide opportunities to explicitly teach abstract and discipline-specific words, morphology, and etymology.

You could use School Journal texts on the same topic or theme to support extended discussions of content knowledge and perspectives.

Fluent readers should predominantly be working with texts at their current year level. However, when you are introducing new skills and concepts you could use simpler texts to reduce cognitive load and use more complex texts to provide enrichment.

Resources coming soon

Ministry of Education resources published in 2025 to support teaching using structured literacy approaches include:

- › revised teacher support materials to help you use structured literacy approaches with the Instructional Series
- › teacher manuals on structured literacy approaches
- › phonics cards for the Māhuri | Sapling phase and more Ready to Read Phonics Plus student books
- › CHAPTERS, Junior Journals, and School Journals.

These resources will be distributed to schools and/or made available on [Tāhūrangi](#) in 2025.

Find more information and links to resources at [Structured Approaches to Literacy – New Zealand Curriculum - Tāhūrangi](#).



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