

What Makes a Proficient Reader?

Effective reading requires the ability to both recognise (decode) words, and comprehend their meaning. These skills use different parts of the brain, with comprehension building on word recognition.

Professor Max Coltheart's Dual Route Cascaded Model of Reading may provide a clue as to why some students have highly developed levels of competence in word recognition. This theory proposes that proficient readers simultaneously apply two word recognition processes to their reading.

The first is being able to decode a word through the knowledge of phonics. Using this method of word recognition, the reader identifies the word by understanding the relationship between graphemes (the letters on the page) and phonemes (the sounds that the letter combinations form).

The second skill adept readers possess is the recognition of 'irregular' words - the approximately 25% of English language words that do not follow standard grapheme-phoneme structure. Examples include words such as *yacht*, *bouquet* and *cough*. Skilled readers identify such words by retrieving them from an 'internal dictionary' of known words. This means, the bigger a person's vocabulary, the more success they will experience when reading.

In addition to strong word recognition processes, highly competent readers also have well developed comprehension abilities, which require an entirely different set of skills and is a topic for another day.

