

## Stepping-stones to English Literacy Acquisition (SELA)

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The Stepping-stones to English Literacy Acquisition (SELA) model is a developmental-instructional model that addresses both reading and writing acquisition processes in English as a foreign language (EFL). The bottom half of the model outlines the developmental path of literacy in EFL from beginning stages to proficiency. The top half suggests instructional content at each stage that serves as a stepping-stone to the following stage of literacy development, which appears in the bottom half of the model. Taken together, this six-stage model represents the target knowledge and skill levels relevant to EFL learners in Israel, and the steps that they need to take in order to progress from stage to stage of the literacy acquisition process.

The stages of the SELA model correspond with the levels of EFL proficiency as delineated in the National curriculum documents (See Figure 1).

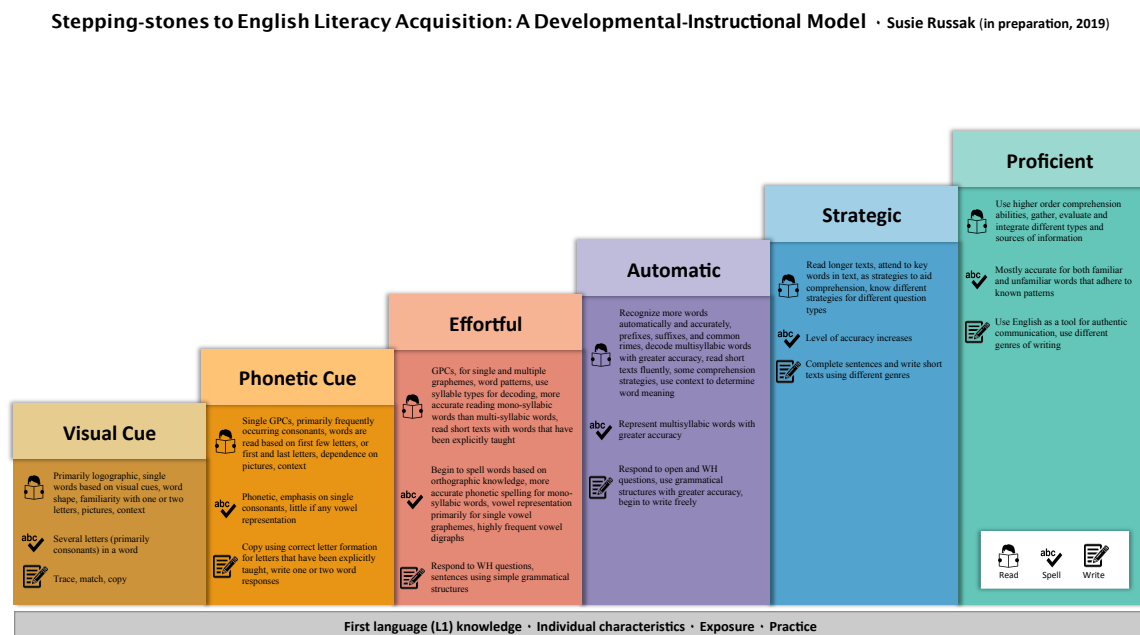
Figure 1: *Correspondence between levels of English of EFL proficiency delineated in the National curriculum documents and stages of literacy development as depicted in the SELA model*

Levels in the Curriculum (2001, revised 2015)	Levels in the Curriculum (2020 revised according to the CEFR)	Stages in the SELA model
Pre-foundation	Pre-basic user	Visual Cue - Phonetic Cue
Pre-foundation- Foundation	Basic user I	Phonetic Cue – Effortful
Foundation- Intermediate	Basic user II	Effortful - Automatic
Intermediate- Proficiency	Independent user I	Strategic – Proficient
Proficiency	Independent user II	Proficient

In what follows, each half of the model will be described in greater detail. See Appendix 1 for explanations of abbreviations that appear in the model.

The bottom half of the model delineates the developmental stages of literacy acquisition (See Figure 2). Descriptions of what a learner "can do" at each developmental stage are divided into three categories: *read*, *spell*, and *write*. The category of *reading* includes decoding accuracy, speed and fluency, *spelling* includes target levels of accuracy for specific units, and *writing* includes letter formation and expressive skills. The bottom half of the model is built on a base of first language knowledge. This base presumes that EFL learners have reached a level of proficiency in their first language (L1), and in many cases, may even have a certain level of literacy skills in a second language (L2). Prior L1 literacy knowledge, and in the case of Arabic speaking and many immigrant pupils, Hebrew L2 knowledge and experience, serve as the base on which to build, and extend children's language and literacy experiences. Individual learner characteristics, including levels of motivation and specific educational needs, may account for variations within and across each stage of development, and therefore, must be considered as part of the foundation upon which to build literacy acquisition. Finally, exposure and continued practice are essential to building fluency and automaticity at all levels of language and literacy acquisition.

Figure 2: *The bottom half of the SELA model: Developmental stage*



The top half of the model depicts the stepping-stones that enable the progression from one stage of literacy development to the following one (See Figure 3). Target

stepping-stone skills are divided into three linguistic levels: *sub lexical* = syllables, onsets- rimes, morphemes and phonemes, *lexical* = word types, etymology, and *text* = differing lengths, genres and questions. In order to successfully advance from stage to stage, the EFL learner should reach mastery of the stepping-stone skills at each linguistic level for that stage. Furthermore, the progression to proficient literacy skills is a cumulative process where skills at each stage build on skills from earlier levels in a cumulative manner.

This section of the model is founded on five principles, which should guide the learning process at all levels of language acquisition:

(1) Continued development of English oral language skills are the basis upon which written language skills are grafted. Oral language skills include phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Research indicates that the quality of oral language skills affect the pace and quality of reading acquisition (Seidenberg, 2017).

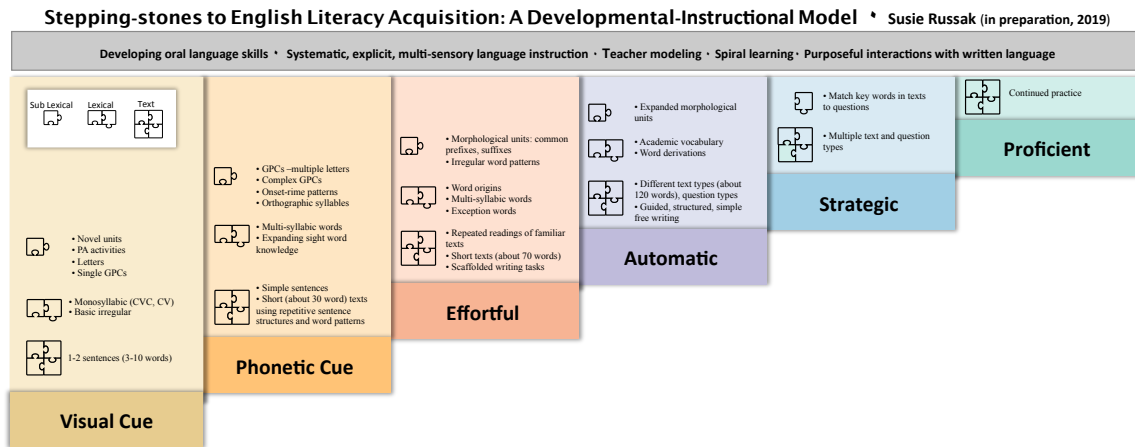
(2) EFL instruction must be systematic, explicit, and multi-sensory. Multiple studies indicate that explicit instruction contributes significantly to literacy acquisition among both average and struggling learners (Archer & Hughes, 2011; IDA, 2019).

(3) As an integral component of explicit instruction, teachers should model learning processes and strategies in order to facilitate learning for all students (Harbour, Evanovich, Sweigart & Hughes, 2015).

(4) Spiral learning is based on the idea that new learning has a continuous relationship with old learning (Bruner, 1960; Harden & Stamper, 1999). When learning takes place in a spiral method, previously taught skills are revisited, strengthened and consolidated in a focused, sequential manner (Gibbs, 2014). For learning to be successful, it should incorporate on-going assessment. On-going assessment allows teachers to have up-to-date information about what their pupils know, can do and still need to learn. Information gleaned from on-going assessment can help teachers plan spiral instruction to ensure that pupils are getting individualized attention, even if they are learning in a small group or a whole class situation.

(5) Learners should have purposeful and intentional interactions with language (Ukrainetz, 2015).

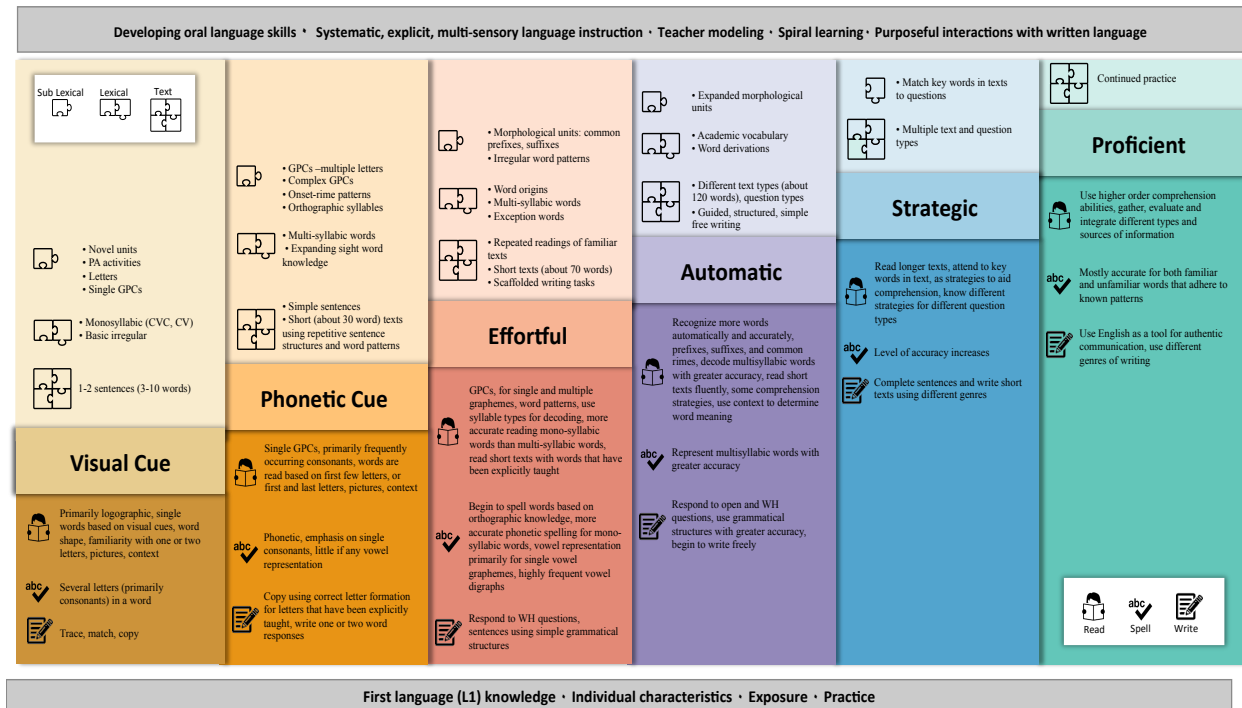
Figure 3: *The top half of the model: Stepping-stones*



The complete SELA model (see Figure 4), or either one of the sections, can be used by multiple stakeholders, who are involved in the EFL literacy acquisition process. Teachers, for example, can use the developmental model (bottom half) to identify the stage at which their learners are functioning and use the stepping-stones (top half) to know how to help them progress to the next stage of literacy development. The whole model can also be used as the basis for designing short and long-term goals for instructional units, for creating yearly work plans, and for developing individual or small group interventions for struggling learners. Moreover, the model provides specific descriptions of observable and teachable behaviors. These descriptors can be used by teachers, teacher trainers, counselors, material developers, and others when sharing information about individual and groups of EFL learners, and planning instruction/interventions, as well as assessments.

Figure 4: *The Stepping-stones to English Literacy Acquisition (SELA) model*

## Stepping-stones to English Literacy Acquisition: A Developmental-Instructional Model · Susie Russak (in preparation, 2019)



## References

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*Appendix 1: Key to abbreviations in the model*

Developmental Model (bottom half)

- GPC = grapheme-phoneme correspondence
- WH = question words that usually begin with the letters WH

Instructional Model (top half)

PA = phonological awareness

CVC = consonant –vowel - consonant= closed syllable

CV = consonant – vowel = open syllable