

## On-screen reading and the new Primary Framework

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As will be well-known to anyone with even a passing interest in the subject, the new Primary Framework seeks to give a clearer structure to the teaching of Literacy at Primary level. Introducing such a structure is all very well, but the proof of the structural pudding is whether it results in happier, more motivated, more *literate* children. And thereby – happier, more motivated, more *fulfilled* teachers.

So – how does the new Primary Framework for Literacy seek to reach this laudable goal? Well, firstly it identifies twelve strands of learning. These strands reflect the four aspects of language identified as key in the Rose Report – speaking and listening, reading and writing. Learning objectives are aligned to twelve strands, the objectives for which are grouped under two main headings:

- Speak and listen for a range of purposes in different contexts
- Read and write for a range of purposes on paper *and on screen*

On-screen reading is, therefore, presented as an integral part of the new Primary Framework. To crystallise *why* it needs to be an integral part of it, consider the types of office-based job for which many of our charges might be destined. Twenty or thirty years ago the average office worker would have spent a lot of their time looking at bits of paper. These days they are likely to spend as much, or more, of their time, looking at screens. And on-screen reading is likely to be increasingly important to those *not* destined for an office – for example, how much longer are banks likely to bother with old-fashioned paper statements?

Having established the importance of on-screen texts, the new Framework seeks to include them alongside traditional texts on paper, with the on-screen element ranging across different “genres” – (i.e. narrative, poetry, non-fiction). It is important to note that an on-screen text can take various guises – but in most cases it will be more than just a page of text transferred onto screen. It is likely to incorporate some kind of interactive element or enhancement. “On-screen texts” should, therefore, be distinguished from simply “reading on screen”.

One of the things that teachers are expected to encourage under the new Framework is the exploration of different text types. Not just reading a text, but investigating its purpose. Why was it written? At whom is it aimed? Why does it take the form that it does?

In order to encourage this investigation, children must be given the opportunity to read and discuss a range of different text-types – oral, written and visual. Each text-type can serve a different purpose, or reach a different audience. For example, many people are “visual learners” – read them a set of instructions, and it will pass them by. Show them a picture, and they will understand it.

The beauty of an on-screen text is that it allows you to explore the possibilities of oral, written and visual at the same time. In a single on-screen text you can *listen* to something, *read* something and *see* something. On-screen texts thereby support *visual* literacy, but go further still – to create a new kind of literacy which we might call “multi-modal”.

In addition, a useful side-effect of on-screen texts is that the medium itself is engaging, even before you get to the content. For example, innovative use of

whiteboard technology, or some rousing introductory music, can grab the attention of a reluctant reader. Changing the medium gives the message more chance to get through. And by hooking someone into reading on screen, you stand a chance of hooking someone into reading in general.

So – on-screen texts support the *theory* of the new Primary Framework by forming part of its core objectives. They support the *practice* of teaching by giving teachers something engaging and interesting to teach. And they support *learning* by being engaging, interesting and *different*.

However, the best text of any type is unlikely to engage and interest pupils in the classroom if it fails to engage and interest teachers. A potential issue for on-screen texts is that various “buzzwords” and pieces of jargon have sprung up around them – and nothing turns off a newcomer to a subject like unfamiliar language which serves to exclude them.

So, let’s bust a few bits of jargon – some of the words which you might come across in the context of on-screen texts – which, indeed, you may already have come across in this article – and which might benefit from some explanation.

**Multi-modal** – operating in different modes at the same time. For example – allowing people to see the written word and hear the same word spoken. Or seeing an illustrative image supported by an evocative sound effect. Or clicking on a hyperlink and being directed to a piece of explanatory video. Thus, an on-screen multi-modal text uses many modes of communication simultaneously to achieve its ends.

**Radial Reading** – reading which ranges across the screen, rather than taking the conventional route of left to right, top to bottom. For example – imagine that you visit a website for the first time. Do you read it left to right, top to bottom? It’s more likely that you scan around in a more random way, with your eye falling on whatever catches its attention. That’s radial reading.

**Non-Linear** – a text which also breaks away from conventional structure – in this case, the convention of starting at page 1, and ending at page 5, by way of pages 2, 3 and 4. A non-linear text can be read in a range of different orders, and yet still get the reader from the same start point to the same end point. Crucially, the structure of a non-linear text is governed by the reader rather than the author. So, rather than pages 1-2-3-4-5 I might choose to read pages 3-4-1-2-5. A website is an example of a non-linear text. It will house different pages which you might choose to access in any order.

**Hyperlink** – an object in an on-screen text, (specifically, a web-based text), which sends you to another text, (or another part of the same text). For example, if you order something online, you might be invited to read the “terms and conditions”. The words “terms and conditions” might be **emboldened** or underlined, and the cursor will turn into a hand when it hovers over them – that’s a hyperlink.

These are just a handful of examples to illustrate the sort of jargon that you might come across. Don’t let it put you off. Behind most pieces of jargon there is a useful and worthwhile concept waiting to break out.

By now, I hope that you see the importance of on-screen texts, both in terms of their position in the new Primary Framework, and their role in life. You understand their

benefits, and know not to be intimidated by their associated jargon. So, how should you integrate on-screen reading into your teaching?

The key is to base your work around an on-screen text in the same way as you might a traditional, paper text. In other words, the on-screen text is not a *replacement*, but an *alternative*, an *evolution*, an *enhancement*. It does not need a fundamentally different approach.

Plan your teaching into units or sequences across weeks and terms: read and enjoy an on-screen text, analyse it, discuss it, explore it; maybe re-enact it in some way – and then, perhaps, create your own multimedia, on-screen text!

The key thing is this – you know what makes a good lesson. You know the value of an on-screen text. Put the two together and hey presto ... seamless integration. The beauty of on-screen texts is that they provide a rich new vein of spin-off ideas. Create your own multimedia presentation! Record a voice-over or a sound-track! Look for images which could illustrate this text! Create hyperlinks to texts which illustrate the points you want to make! Use websites to test hypotheses! (For example, the hypothesis about the world's longest river being the Nile. Or is it the Amazon?) And thereby create instant cross-curricular links!

We should not lose sight of the key skills which are specific to on-screen reading, and which you should therefore seek to build into your planning.

- Accessing information from electronic referencing systems (e.g. websites, search engines)
- Understanding on-screen icons and functionality (e.g. hyperlinks, drop-down menus, scroll bar)
- Developing strategies for what to look for, where (i.e. “where shall we look first if we want to look up what the longest river in the world is?”)

To this we can add the range of more traditional reading skills.

Having engaged the pupils and engaged the teachers, on-screen texts also need to engage parents. Which, in practice, means that parents need to understand and “buy in” to their value. To achieve this end, we might point to the increasing need for “on-screen reading in everyday life. However, the most effective means is to point out how on-screen reading is giving their children pleasure, as well as providing a means of teaching reading. Within schools, it is expected that children are exposed to a rich and varied reading diet (shared, guided, independent, paired) – it is also expected that they are switched on to reading for pleasure, as well as for education, thereby increasing our chances of creating life-long readers.

Which brings us back to where we started. The content of the text brings the education. The *medium* of the text brings the motivation, and thereby the happiness. For the pupil, for their parents, and for you.