

# Why the Three-Cueing Model Hinders Reading Proficiency

Instructional strategies that employ the **three-cueing systems model** of reading include visual memory as the primary basis for teaching word recognition or reading based on meaning, structure and syntax, and visual cues, which is also known as “MSV.” This model has been found to hinder reading proficiency due to the following reasons:

- 1. Ineffective instructional methods:** The three-cueing method encourages students to guess rather than sound out unfamiliar words. It relies on visual cues (pictures) or context to decipher words, which can hinder true reading proficiency. (See the [Purple Challenge](#) (video)).
- 2. Lack of empirical evidence:** The three-cueing approach lacks empirical evidence of its effectiveness. Neuroscientists have conducted studies using functional MRI scans, revealing that the three-cueing model does not align with how our brains acquire reading skills (Brem, S., et al, 2010). (See [An Explanation of the Reading Brain](#) (video)).
- 3. Misalignment to the Science of Reading:** In contrast, the **science of reading** draws from multiple disciplines, including developmental psychology, cognitive science, and cognitive neuroscience. It emphasizes five essential elements: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Under the science of reading approach, reading involves letter-by-letter processing of words, which is essential for becoming skilled readers. This is the evidence basis for Kentucky’s *Read to Succeed Act* (2022).
  - a) The National Reading Panel (NRP) report in 2000 found that explicit, systematic, cumulative instruction in these five essential elements is key to reading success: phonemic awareness; phonics; vocabulary; fluency; and comprehension.
  - b) Reading is accomplished with letter-by-letter processing of a word (Rayner, et al, 2001, 2002).
  - c) According to Kozloff (2002), if a child memorizes ten words, then the child can read ten words. But, if the child can learn the sounds of ten letters, the child can read 350 three-sound words, 4,320 four-sound words, and 21,650 five-sound words. Thus, teaching whole word memorization is limited, but **learning phonics empowers students with an exponential effect.**
- 4. Creates greater long-term reading difficulties:** According to Moats (2020), students taught using the three-cueing method may encounter long-term reading difficulties. By not providing a strong foundation in phonemic awareness and phonics, students may struggle to progress beyond basic decoding skills, leading to difficulties in tackling more complex texts as they advance through school. (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1260264.pdf>)
- 5. Further disadvantages dyslexic students:** The three-cueing method disproportionately disadvantages students with dyslexia, as it relies heavily on visual memory and context rather than phonemic decoding. Dyslexic students often struggle with visual processing and benefit more from explicit phonics instruction, making the three-cueing method unsuitable for their needs. (<https://dyslexiaida.org/structured-literacy-effective-instruction-for-students-with-dyslexia-and-related-reading-difficulties/>)
- 6. State actions prohibiting the three-cueing method:** Leaders in ten states—Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin—have taken action by banning three-cueing from K-3 reading instruction.

Due to the lack of empirical support for the three-cueing system, prioritizing evidence-based approaches, like the science of reading is crucial to improving students’ reading proficiency and better maximizes current statutory requirements for early literacy instruction provided under *Read to Succeed Act* (2022).