
Book review

The Science of Reading: A handbook

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Snowling, M. J., Hulme, C., & Nation, K. (Eds.) (2022). *The Science of Reading: A handbook*. Wiley Blackwell.

The term ‘Science of Reading’ seems ubiquitous now, but when the first edition of *The Science of Reading: A handbook* (Snowling & Hulme, Eds.) was published in 2005, the term was seen relatively rarely outside of academia. It has now come to be shorthand for a set of research findings that are used to define and describe evidence-based practice, but this book is an insight into the real Science of Reading.

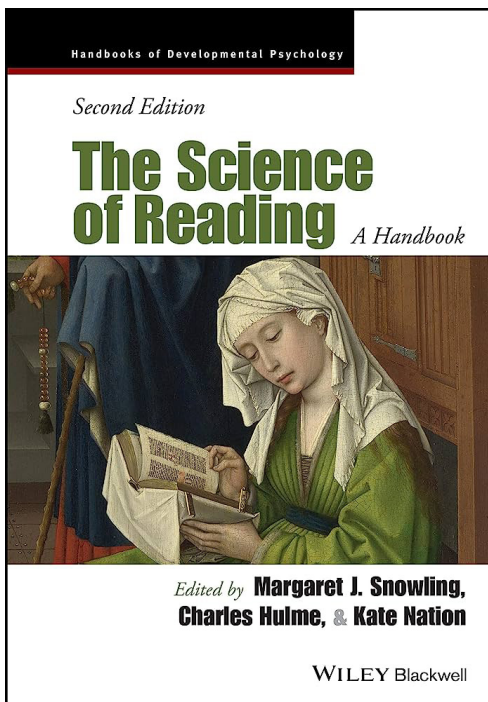
The Science of Reading: A handbook has 24 chapters organised in six parts: Word recognition, Learning to read and spell, Reading comprehension, Reading in different languages, Disorders of reading, and Biological and social correlates of reading. Chapters are written by some big-name researchers, including Anne Castles, Kate Nation, Kathleen Rastle, Mark Seidenberg, Kate Cain, Arne Lervåg, Monica Melby-Lervåg, Charles Perfetti, Rebecca Treiman, Donald Compton and Robert Savage. Other contributions are by researchers who are not household names among SoR enthusiasts but nonetheless have made serious and significant contributions to the literature.

I enjoyed the chapter by Paul van den Broek and Panyiota Kendeou in which they propose a ‘Comprehensive Model of Discourse Comprehension’. Their chapter describes various frameworks that have been proposed over the past 90 years for the way in which mental models are created in order to comprehend text. They explain the difference between passive processes and active processes in reading comprehension and how they lie on a continuum of closeness to – and distance from – the text. For example, a simple reader-initiative (active) process that is close to the text is re-reading a sentence, whereas making inferences using background knowledge would be a process that is distant from the text itself.

A sizeable proportion of the book is devoted to word reading and spelling, and the cognitive processes that are taking place as phonological and orthographic information is synthesised. The level of detail is phenomenal. Some seems, at this stage, to be purely for the sake of intellectual inquiry, and there’s always a place for that. But there are also chapters that describe the implications for this research for instruction, and the gaps in evidence that limit application.

It’s impossible to summarise this book in a few hundred words in a way that does justice to its contents. But I can tell you this much: there’s nothing in there that supports play-based learning when it comes to reading, so don’t bother looking!

If you are relatively new to the scientific research on reading, this is not the first book you should read. It’s probably not even the second book. But if you want an in-depth exploration of the incredible precision and complexity of the body of research known as the Science of Reading, written and edited by some of the very best researchers in the field, this book is worth having on your shelf.



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