

Example of Tier 2 intervention for subject-specific reading comprehension

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The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) recommends the use of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) to better assist Years 7 to 9 students struggling with foundational literacy and numeracy skills. If you're unfamiliar with the MTSS framework, we recommend you start with AERO's [Introduction to a Multi-Tiered System of Supports](#) explainer.

This practice resource provides an example of how a teacher could plan and implement Tier 2 assessment and intervention for Year 7 Humanities and Social Sciences: Civics and Citizenship, based on the Australian Curriculum. It's a supporting resource in a [series of guidance](#) created in partnership with the Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation (DSF).

Developing reading comprehension

Interventions targeting secondary students' reading comprehension are very effective, but an intentional time investment is required to ensure that the skills and knowledge developed can be translated to a range of contexts.^{1,2} One way to improve reading comprehension for secondary school students at risk is to embed intervention in subject-specific curriculum. This can be done as a Tier 2 intervention delivered to groups of students with the aim of addressing gaps in subject knowledge, vocabulary and familiarity with the way information is expressed in the subject.

The example in this practice resource may not be perfectly applicable to any given school's unique context, so professional judgment should be made to ensure the best possible support for students in a specific cohort. AERO's video snapshots show [how 7 schools across Australia use interventions](#).

Identify curriculum requirements and background knowledge

The Australian Curriculum for Civics and Citizenship (Version 9) includes the following Year 7 Content Description for Knowledge and Understanding under Government and Democracy: ‘the key features of Australia’s system of government, including democracy, the Australian Constitution, responsible government and federalism’ (AC9HC7K01).³

Accessing the Year 7 course of study on this topic requires background knowledge and understanding of government and democracy which is expected to be covered in earlier years. In version 9 of the Australian Curriculum, this knowledge and understanding is addressed in Year 6, with the following concepts explored through ‘significant individuals, events and ideas that led to Australia’s Federation, the Constitution and democratic system of government’ (AC9HS6K01).⁴ It includes the following elaborations:

- exploring how the United States of America’s model of federalism (the Washington system) contributed to the ideas for Andrew Clark’s first draft of the Australian Constitution
- investigating how Australia’s system of law and government has origins in the Magna Carta, the English Civil War and the Westminster system and, therefore, why we have a constitutional monarchy, as well as why there was a separation of powers (legislative, executive, judiciary).

To be ready to access the Year 7 curriculum, students require knowledge of vocabulary and concepts including, federalism, alternative systems of government, democracy, the levels of government in Australia, the way politicians are elected in Australia and voting, including who is allowed to vote. They also require broader knowledge regarding Australia’s colonisation and federation, our connection to Britain and why the Westminster system was used as a model, the formation of the United States of America and the importance of a constitution in that process, and what role governments fulfil in society. Key vocabulary they must know includes *democracy, government, elector, representative/representation, vote, politician, responsibility, roles and systems*.

Diagnostic assessment

A curriculum-based assessment is needed to gauge students’ existing background and vocabulary knowledge. This is most practically achieved via written tasks, which are also less likely to overestimate knowledge than a reading comprehension task. Students whose spelling difficulties prevent them from completing written tasks should be asked to complete tasks verbally. This assessment might only be administered to students who have been flagged through universal screening as requiring intervention for comprehension, or it could be administered to a whole student cohort.

Vocabulary knowledge includes knowing how to define a keyword and use it in discourse (speech or writing). This means a well-planned vocabulary assessment is likely to require students to both define a keyword and use it in context.⁵ This type of assessment has the added benefit of assessing a student’s background knowledge, which is needed to produce a contextually appropriate sentence. One option would be to ask students to complete a sentence stem to demonstrate their understanding of a word, rather than generate a unique sentence. This prevents students from writing sentences featuring the word without understanding it (e.g., ‘I like governments.’).

A simple version of a vocabulary assessment, relevant to determining which students require a Tier 2 vocabulary intervention for Year 7 Civics and Citizenship is presented in Box 1.

Box 1: Tier 2 assessment: Year 7 Civics and Citizenship

Define *government*:

Finish this sentence: *Australia has 3 levels of government, which*

.....

Students' performance on these assessments can reveal whether they need Tier 2 intervention in each subject, and what knowledge teachers should target. It can also be used as a baseline for ongoing progress monitoring.

Tier 2 intervention

Tier 2 intervention may be most effective when it starts prior to a unit of study in the Tier 1 classroom, because this allows at-risk students to start to develop the baseline knowledge their classmates already possess. This is sometimes known as 'pre-loading'. However, it can still be effective to start Tier 2 instruction at the same time or a little later than when the topic is introduced in general education classroom teaching.

Instructional materials may be drawn from recommended Australian Curriculum resources from previous academic years, or other sources that cover the required content in appropriate detail using accessible language. Teaching staff may need to be prepared to read aloud or use assistive technology to help students access texts, given that many students who require Tier 2 comprehension intervention will have underdeveloped word recognition or language comprehension skills. The chosen texts may be read several times, with teaching staff frequently pausing to:

1. discuss or elaborate on information
2. generate teacher–student discussion by calling for predictions or inferences
3. assist students with identifying and verbally expressing the main idea of the paragraph or the whole text.⁶

A selection of new keyword meanings (i.e., vocabulary) should be explicitly taught using an evidence-informed model, using the text to provide context.⁷ The information gained from the text should be directly and explicitly linked back to the Tier 1 curriculum content to support students to succeed in general education classroom lessons on the same topic. Ideally, lessons would end with students composing a short text (written or spoken) expressing the main idea from the lesson. These written samples clarify students' understanding of the topic by requiring them to process it, and allow teachers to conduct formative assessment of students' response to intervention.

[Box 2](#) presents an example lesson plan relevant to providing Tier 2 intervention for Year 7 Civics and Citizenship. The aim of this lesson is to develop students' prerequisite knowledge for accessing curriculum content. The lesson may be delivered over one or multiple sessions, depending on time constraints.

Box 2: Tier 2 intervention: Year 7 Civics and Citizenship

Students and teaching staff have copies of the text [The Responsibilities of the Three Levels of Government](#), a fact sheet published by the Parliamentary Education Office (2023).

Teaching staff prepare a set of questions to ask at critical junctures of the text that:

- » **link to prior knowledge** – for example, ‘It says the third level of government is local councils, which might also be known as “shires”. Think for a moment and then tell your partner which council our school is in.’
- » **support students to make inferences** – for example, ‘Can anyone see a problem with having different governments in each state and territory? Think for a moment and then write your idea down.’
- » **assist students with making within-text inferences** – for example, ‘It says here “Each level is responsible for providing services”. What is meant by “levels”?’

The teaching staff member reads the text aloud while students follow along. At key points, the teaching staff member pauses to ask these pre-planned questions, and engages students in discussions to clarify thinking, find evidence in the text, or connect with prior knowledge and experience. Comprehension strategies, such as graphic organisers, paraphrasing, and collaborative discussion are employed as appropriate, starting with modelling by teaching staff and then guiding students through their use. Following discussion, students write or verbally provide a short response to the question or idea being explored.

During the lesson, the word *government* is taught explicitly. It should be taught after it’s encountered in the text, using the following procedure:

- » **Explain the word in context** – ‘This text is discussing Australia’s *government*. In this text, *government* means the groups of people that rule the people living in Australia. Everyone, say *government*.’
- » **Define the word** – ‘*Government* means “The system of ruling a country or part of a country”. Let’s say that together: “A government is a system of ruling a country or part of a country”. What is the system of ruling a country or part of a country? (A government.) What is a government? (The system of ruling a country or part of a country.)’
- » **Provide examples and elaborations** – ‘A government may be a democracy, where every adult gets to vote for the people in the government. Australia is a democracy. A government could also be a dictatorship, in which one person takes over without being voted in fairly and makes all the decisions. Adolf Hitler ruled Germany as a dictatorship. To be a government, it must make the decisions for part or all of a country. Australia has 3 levels of government: one that rules the whole country, one that rules each state and territory, and one that rules local communities, like the towns and cities we live in. Spain is another example of a country that has a government for the whole country, but also a separate government for different regions, such as the Catalanian region.’

- » **Ask students to engage with examples** – ‘Does the United States of America have a government?’ (Yes.) ‘Does Indonesia have a government?’ (Yes.) ‘Does China have a government?’ (Yes.) ‘Does Woolworths have a government?’ (No.) ‘That’s right. The United States, Indonesia and China are all countries, and they’re all ruled by governments. Woolworths is not a country so the organisation that runs it isn’t a government.’
- » **Ask students to use the word** – ‘Complete this sentence: “A government is important because _”. Think of your answer, and then write it in your book.’
- » **Link this information** about the 3 levels of government back to the concept of separation of powers, which is part of the Year 7 Civics and Citizenship curriculum. Separation of powers refers to the division of responsibilities across the 3 levels of government in Australia. Finish the lesson by asking students to write a sentence summarising the 3 levels of government.

Monitoring progress

Student progress can be monitored using formative assessment, which includes their verbal responses during lessons and written responses during activities. Written evidence is particularly important for evaluating progress over time. The student’s progress in Tier 1 (general education classroom) lessons and their performance in year-level assessments should also be monitored for evidence of the impact of the Tier 2 intervention. Any curriculum-based measures used to assess instructional needs can also be used to track progress over time.

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Endnotes

- 1 Donegan, R., & Wanzek, J. (2021). Effects of reading interventions implemented for upper elementary struggling readers: A look at recent research. *Reading and Writing*, 34(8), 1943–1977. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-021-10123-y>
- 2 Edmonds, M., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Reutebuch, C., Cable, A., Tackett, K., & Schnakenberg, J. (2009). A synthesis of reading interventions and effects on reading comprehension outcomes for older struggling readers. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 262–300. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308325998>
- 3 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (n.d.-a). *Civics and citizenship 7–10 (Year 7)*. <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/learning-areas/civics-and-citizenship-7-10/year-7>
- 4 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (n.d.-b). *HASS F-6 (Year 6)*. <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/learning-areas/hass-f-6/year-6?detailed-content-descriptions>
- 5 Beck, I., McKeown, M., & Kucan, L. (2013). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction* (2nd ed.). Guilford Publications.
- 6 See Beck, I., McKeown, M., & Sandora, C. (2020). *Robust comprehension instruction with questioning the author: 15 years smarter*. Routledge.
- 7 Such as that outlined by Beck, I., McKeown, M., & Kucan, L. (2013). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction* (2nd ed.). Guilford Publications.