



Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning To Read

Frank Smith

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Understanding Reading revolutionized reading theory and research when it first appeared in 1971 and it has continued as a leader in the field through successive editions. Smith's aim in the fifth edition of this classic text continues as it was in the first: to shed light on fundamental aspects of the complex human act of reading -- linguistic, physiological, psychological, and social -- and on what is involved in learning to read. This edition critically examines current theories, instructional practices, and controversies, covering a wide range of disciplines but always remaining accessible to students and to classroom teachers.

Because reading should not be regarded as a special kind of activity but rather one that involves far broader aspects of human thought and behavior, an understanding of reading cannot be achieved without consideration of the nature of language and of various operating characteristics of the human brain. Consequently, the first half of this book is devoted to such topics as comprehension, knowledge, language, vision, and memory. A major change in the present edition is that while continuing to accommodate recent developments in research, theory, and the author's own ideas, a new section is introduced at the end of each chapter to outline the more persistent and contentious issues that surround particular topics.

Within cognitive science, two new and contradictory theories related to language learning -- modular theory and connectionism -- have become influential. Both are discussed together with a closer look at other metaphors currently employed in psychological and educational theorizing. This book also highlights the ideological clash between whole language and direct instruction, partly at the expense of linguist Noam Chomsky and behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner, who figured prominently in earlier editions. No other text integrates such a wide range of topics relative to reading, and few other texts are as readable or as "user-friendly" for instructors, students, and practitioners.

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