



The **Reading Rope** was first proposed by Dr. Hollis Scarborough in 2001 and builds off the Simple View Model proposed by Gough and Tunmer (1986). Gough and Tunmer proposed that reading comprehension is a product of a child’s **ability to decode (word recognition)** and a child’s **ability to understand language orally (language comprehension)**. [See back for image!]

Scarborough argued that each of those skills – decoding (or word recognition) and listening comprehension – are each made of a set of necessary sub-skills that are interdependent. Skilled reading is the fluent coordination of all the skills. Children become more “strategic” and “automatic” as they learn to read.

Let’s look at each domain in turn:

**Word Recognition:**

Sight Recognition	Scarborough defines these words as words that can be directly accessed without needing to decode (i.e. the student has stored the word in their long-term memory, whether or not it is truly decodable.) <sup>1</sup>
Decoding	Decoding is the efficient ability to match letters (graphemes) to sounds (phonemes) and blend them left to right. It also encompasses the ability to accurately read words in a connected text.
Phonological Awareness	<b>Phonological awareness is the awareness of sound parts in larger wholes. For example, words in sentences, syllables in words, and phonemes within words. Phonemic awareness is the ability to identify and manipulate phonemes (sounds) within words.</b>

**Language Comprehension:**

Background Knowledge	A student’s general knowledge about the world and how it works.
Vocabulary	A student’s breadth and depth of word understanding, and their understanding of the relationships between words.
Language Structures	A student’s ability to understand syntax and semantics. Syntax is the rules for how words and phrases combine together to form sentences (similar to grammar, but usually considered more broad); semantics is the meaning of words in context.
Verbal Reasoning	A student’s ability to reason with spoken language: to question, to infer, to draw conclusions, to understand discourse.
Literacy Knowledge	A student’s understanding of literacy terms from the most basic (concepts of print like one-to-one correspondence and left-to-right orientation) to the more advanced (concepts of chapter, theme, character, plot.)

<sup>1</sup> Many popular curriculum conflate the terms **sight word, high frequency word, and irregular (or red) words**. Sight words are words that can be automatically retrieved without laborious decoding (see “Orthographic Mapping” reading.) **High-frequency** words are words that occur frequently in all texts, but often can be easily decoded (*has, is*). High-frequency words can make up to 80% of a beginning reader’s text. Eventually high-frequency words only make up about 10-15% of all words in a college-level text. **Irregular words** are words that cannot be regularly decoded (*eye, one*). Did you know that only about 4% of English words are truly irregular? 50% of English words are totally predictable, 34% of words are predictable except for one sound, and only about 4% are totally unpredictable, like “eye.” Many teachers group decodable, high-frequency words with irregular words. For example, *have* actually is spelled following phonetic spelling rules, but kids usually haven’t learned that rule by the time they encounter *have*, so teachers teach it as an irregular word because it doesn’t follow the very common VCe rule.

