

Three-cuing

Three-cueing is a reading-instruction method used especially for beginning readers. Under this method, when children encounter an unfamiliar word, they are encouraged to draw on three “cues” (hence the name) to guess or infer the word — rather than sounding it out letter by letter (phonics). [Wikipedia+2thedyslexiaclassroom.com+2](#)

The three types of cues are typically:

- **Meaning / semantic cues:** using context and the overall meaning of the sentence or story to guess a word that makes sense. [Shanahan on Literacy+2Let's Go Learn+2](#)
- **Syntax / structural cues:** using grammar or sentence structure to predict what type of word fits (e.g. expecting a noun vs. a verb). [Shanahan on Literacy+1](#)
- **Visual / graphophonic cues:** using the appearance of letters, letter patterns, or initial letters to visually guess the word. [UMSL Blogs+2Let's Go Learn+2](#)

Historically, three-cueing was associated with broader reading-instruction philosophies such as Balanced Literacy and Whole Language, which emphasize meaning, context, and whole-text reading over explicit phonics. [Wikipedia+2Wikipedia+2](#)

Critics argue that although three-cueing recognizes how some readers “guess” words, it doesn’t build the strong decoding skills — translating letters into sounds — that research shows are essential for fluent reading. [Shanahan on Literacy+2thedyslexiaclassroom.com+2](#)

Why It's Controversial / Losing Favor

Advocates of what's called the Science of Reading argue that decoding (phonics) should be the foundation of early reading instruction if learners are to become proficient readers — especially in English, whose spelling-sound relationships can be complex. [Education Week+2Wikipedia+2](#)

Critics of three-cueing argue that relying heavily on meaning or context to guess words may work sometimes — but it doesn’t teach children to decode words independently, which becomes a disadvantage once they read more advanced texts with fewer contextual supports (e.g. chapter books without pictures).

[thedyslexiaclassroom.com+2Shanahan on Literacy+2](#)

Which States Have Banned or Restricted Three-Cueing

- Over the past few years, a growing number of U.S. states have passed legislation banning or restricting three-cueing — typically as part of broader “science of reading” reforms. [Lexia+3Missouri Independent+3ExcelinEd In Action+3](#)

Some of the states that have outlawed or restricted it include:

- Florida — bans three-cueing from word-reading instruction. [flcharterinstitute.org+1](#)
- Indiana — banned three-cueing as part of reading-instruction reform. [ExcelinEd In Action+1](#)
- North Carolina — also among states outlawing it. [ExcelinEd In Action+1](#)
- Ohio — law prohibits use of the three-cueing system in public schools. [Shanahan on Literacy+2ExcelinEd In Action+2](#)
- South Carolina — banned it in 2023. [Let's Go Learn+1](#)
- Texas — banned three-cueing in reading instruction. [ExcelinEd In Action+1](#)
- West Virginia — also included among states banning it. [ExcelinEd In Action+1](#)
- Wisconsin — likewise banned it. [ExcelinEd In Action+1](#)
- Alabama — as of 2024, legislation passed to ban the three-cueing system. [Alabama Reflector+1](#)
- Missouri — in 2025, banned use of three-cueing as the primary method of reading instruction (though allowed as a supplementary method). [Missouri Independent+2STLPR+2](#)
- In total, according to recent sources, at least 11 states had formally banned three-cueing in schools (or restricted it strongly) by 2024–2025. [Wikipedia+2Albert Shanker Institute+2](#)