FIRST MODEL PROJECT MANAGERS OF 2015

EEF STUDY SHOWS GROWTH WITH AR

INAUGURAL WHAT KIDS ARE READING AWARDS

MORE THAN TWICE EXPECTED GROWTH
AT SUFFOLK ACADEMY

SPRING 2015



CELEBRATING SUCCESS!

Image of John Green @ www.thesc

Welcome

I am very pleased to introduce this new edition of Renaissance News.

The past few months have been very busy for the team at Renaissance Learning™, rolling out the newly enhanced STAR Assessments[™] and launching the seventh annual What Kids Are Reading report to name but two highlights. You can read more about the awards and report launch on page 5.

Two important pieces of independent research have been published recently by the Education Endowment Foundation (page 3) and the National Literacy Trust (page 9) proving once again the positive impact of Accelerated Reader[™] (AR[™]). This research proves what the nearly 4,000 schools using AR across the UK and Ireland already know – AR motivates students to read and their literacy attainment improves as a result.

Our website is regularly updated with news from our team: please visit renlearn.co.uk/blog to keep abreast of the latest news.



Dirk Foch, Managing Director, Renaissance Learning UK Ltd.

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First Model Project Managers of the year awarded

Two teachers have become the first Model Project Managers awarded as part of the Renaissance Certification scheme this academic year.

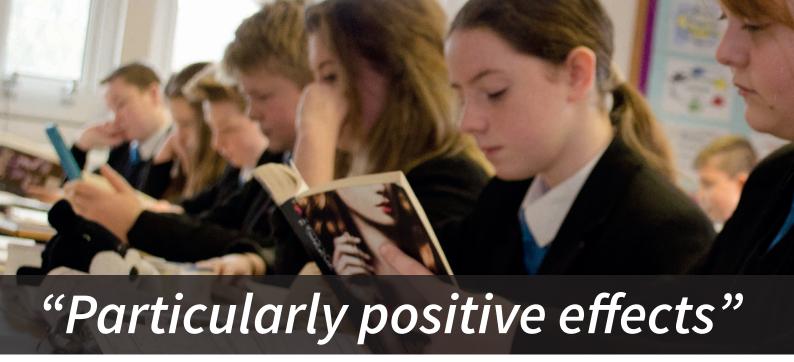
Mary-Jane King and Eileen Bolton have met research-based best practice criteria in a majority of their AR classes, earning over 20 Model and Master Classes between them. In recognition of their achievement, they were awarded plagues at the recent What Kids Are Reading Awards aboard a cruise boat on the River Thames.

Both of the schools awarded plagues for their Certification success are part of the Renaissance School Partnership (RSP) programme. Mary-Jane and Eileen have worked with their RSP programme managers to meet the excellence standards in each of their AR classes, and have received guidance and training towards these goals as part of the programme.

Eileen Bolton (right, above) is the AR co-ordinator at Northumberland Park Community School in North East London. She has made Certification an integral part of the implementation of Accelerated Reader. She has encouraged healthy competition between classes as they have striven to achieve Model Class status in the quickest time possible, and found that teachers are as enthusiastic for the recognition as students are.

Mary-Jane King (left, above) has gone even further and has earned Model School status because over 75% of classes using the programme have reached Model Class standard. "We're all very proud of the pupils' fantastic achievement," Mary-Jane said. "I am consistently impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment to reading from the pupils and staff at East Point Academy."

As these schools have found, Certification is a highly effective way to embed best practices into AR classrooms. You can find out more about Certification at renlearn.co.uk/certification, where you can also see an Honour Roll of classes that have achieved Certification status this academic year.



with AR in independent study by the Education Endowment Foundation

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has published an independent study into the effectiveness of Accelerated Reader. The randomised controlled trial found that students using the programme achieved up to five months' additional growth in their reading ages over 22 weeks.

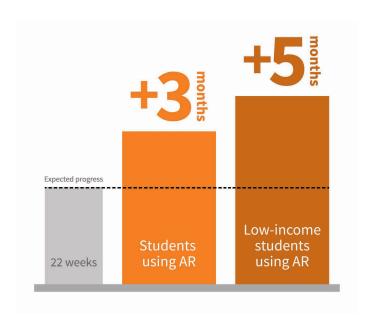
The focus of the study was the use of AR as an intervention tool with students of low prior achievement. It followed the progress of students in Year 7 at four schools who finished Key Stage 2 with English results less than a secure National Curriculum Level 4. Half of the qualifying students used Accelerated Reader for a total of 22 weeks, while the other half were a control group. The report suggests that, if replicated, the intervention has a good chance of delivering similar results in similar conditions.

Effective use of Pupil Premium

AR was found to be at least equally effective for students eligible for free school meals, so it makes an effective use of the Pupil Premium and other additional funding provided in order to narrow the gap in attainment between economically disadvantaged students and their peers.

Commenting on the publication of the report, EEF's chief executive Kevan Collins said:

Good literacy and numeracy skills are essential to success both in secondary school and later in life so it's hugely promising that today's results have provided us with evidence for effective ways to do just that. With programmes like Accelerated Reader showing particularly positive effects, especially for low-income students, we are confident that the results of today's reports will go some way in helping teachers to close their attainment gap.



Positive attitudes

The report also contains anecdotal evidence of the programme's contribution towards creating a culture of reading, with positive reactions from teachers, parents and the students involved in the programme themselves.

Students enjoyed having the opportunity to carry around books they were interested in reading. Some of them also said that they liked reading books because in the end they got a chance to do quizzes on an iPad®.

It was observed that most staff involved became advocates for AR increasingly during the trial, and schools had already made arrangements to continue with and expand the use of AR for future years.

To read the full report, visit: renlearn.co.uk/ar-research

TOPICS COVERED

Assessment

Intervention

Personalised practice

Progress monitoring

The Boulevard Academy was established for students aged 11-16 under the Free Schools programme for the start of the 2013-14 academic year. It was initially opened with 40 students in Year 7. In 2014-15 the Academy took on a cohort of 120 students, and will continue to expand at this rate until it is full in three years' time with 600 students on roll. The school's location in Kingston upon Hull is characterised by low economic activity and poor academic attainment. Over 50% of students attract Pupil Premium funding.

Learning "much more independent" with Accelerated Maths



Andy Grace had previously been the Principal of an Academy in the West Midlands, where he had devised a curriculum that addressed the students' poor levels of literacy.

AR had been an important part of the literacy strategy, and given its success Andy looked to use the programme when developing the curriculum for The Boulevard Academy.

"Because of my past experience with AR, I knew it would be central to what we did at The Boulevard Academy," Andy explains. "Having scaffolded learning around AR in the past, I was looking for opportunities to do the same thing with maths. As a result, we have made Accelerated Maths part of our learning strategy."

"It was important to us that we

used a credible system to assess

our students. It is a big positive

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Curriculum. The reports we get

are increasingly useful for us, for

staff and for parents. This is what

schools are looking for: a good

methodology for establishing a

for us that STAR has a direct

Teaching focused on students and their targets

"AR and AM help to support the teachers, along with subject leaders who are actively involved in the delivery of the programmes. Teaching like this has helped us to focus on the individual students, their needs and personalised targets, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach."

For maths, this means that subject leader Callum Young has an active role in supporting both staff and students. He leads lessons for curriculum groups, and also leads the staff team in setting their teaching methodology.

"Because of how my timetable is set up," Callum describes, "I am able to go into every single maths class in Year 7. Students are timetabled for 9 hours of maths per week, 2.5 hours of which are devoted solely to Accelerated Maths. We expect them to complete three AM objectives each week; once they have passed a practice exercise on the topic they have been learning, they are able to take a test."

Fair and genuine assessments

Students typically join the Academy with literacy and numeracy attainment two or three sub-levels behind where they should be at their ages. Some students are much further behind. Andy was concerned by the reliability of National Curriculum Levels. Given their abolition, he was looking for a reliable replacement. He introduced

STAR Reading[™] and STAR Maths[™], which work hand-in-hand with AR and AM to assess students and inform their learning and practice.

"If we intervened based on the levels we were given as students joined the Academy, we wouldn't be intervening properly," he explains. "We wanted a fair and genuine way to establish students' baseline attainment on their entry to the Academy, so that we can support their progress. So we STAR™ test students on their second day at the Academy."

"It was important to us that we used a credible system to assess our students. It is a big positive for us that STAR has a direct correlation to the new National Curriculum. The reports we get are increasingly useful for us, for staff and for parents. This is what schools are looking

for: a good methodology for establishing a baseline for reporting progress."

Reporting six times per year

Data is fed into year group meetings, where the whole team gets together to create opportunities for review. Callum believes that this focus on data has a direct impact on teaching at the Academy. "The assessments show who has made progress and who hasn't, but they also give teachers the information they need to direct intervention effectively." Learning walks and lesson observations are conducted to ensure that students are being given the support they need to make progress.

that students are being given the support they need to make progress.

The impact on students' attainment has been significant. Students' targets are set ambitiously high – the equivalent to at least three sub-levels of progress each academic year – but with the right support they are meeting the challenge. In maths, for example, 70% of all students had achieved their targets by the end of the Spring Term last they are able to

Callum has seen this in action across the school, remarking that "students have become much more independent with their learning and their knowledge retention has improved. One student made 7 sub-levels of progress," he adds, "but I could mention several students who made similarly impressive improvements."

What Kids Are Reading

2015 Awards and Report launch



For the first time, the 2015 launch of the report was accompanied by the What Kids Are Reading Awards. At a ceremony held on a cruise on the Thames, awards were presented for the most popular books for primary and for secondary students, according to the votes cast by students using Accelerated Reader.

More than 500,000 students across the country cast their votes for the books they enjoyed the most when they took reading practice quizzes with AR this past year. The results were tallied to determine the most popular book for primary- and secondary-aged students. And the winners are...



Most popular book - Primary

Demon Dentist by David Walliams

On the day of the ceremony David was at a literary festival in Dubai but sent a short video acceptance:

"Thank you so much for this fantastic, and actually rather heavy award, which is the most popular book for primary school children, which went to Demon Dentist. I'm absolutely chuffed you voted for me, thank you so much."

Watch the video: renlearn.co.uk/wkar-awards

Outstanding contribution award

Roderick Hunt

Roderick Hunt, along with co-creator Alex Brychta, is responsible for the ever-popular *Magic Key* books in the Oxford Reading Tree programme. Biff, Chip, Kipper and Floppy have a ubiquitous presence in classrooms and libraries up and down the country, and have helped countless children in their early years of becoming fluent and enthusiastic readers. This award recognises the outstanding contribution Roderick has made over the 30 years since the original *Magic Key*

books were first published in 1985.

On receiving his award at the ceremony, Roderick commented on the central importance literacy has for learning:

I am honoured to be the first recipient of the What Kids Are Reading outstanding contribution award. Literacy is vital to the intellectual health of the nation. Becoming a fluent and committed reader should be our gift to every child. Rarely, if ever, have books been more appealing, more engaging and more varied; but never before has reading had to compete with the enticing and beguiling attractions of the digital world.

All power to programmes like
Accelerated Reader that monitor,
motivate and extend a child's
progress into the rich and magical
world of reading. If the Oxford
Reading Tree stories play a small
part in that progression,
I am overjoyed.

Most popular book – Secondary

The Fault in Our Stars by John Green

Accepting the award on John Green's behalf, his UK publisher, Penguin Random House, had this to say:

"We are delighted that The Fault in Our Stars has been chosen as the Most Popular Book in Secondary Schools, particularly because this accolade comes from young people themselves. John continues to be amazed as to how well his book has been received in the UK and this award is greatly appreciated."



On the Renaissance Blog

For more about the WKAR Awards, check out our blog post at: renlearn.co.uk/wkar-awards



HAVE YOU EXPLORED YOU READING AND MATHS DAS

Since the start of this academic year we have introduced a series of significant upgrades to both our STAR Reading and Maths assessments, and the way in which you can view and manipulate the data they provide. As a valued Renaissance Learning customer, your Renaissance Place™ (RP™) site has also been upgraded so if you haven't already, take some time to familiarise yourself with the wealth of data now available.

In addition to combining STAR Reading and AR data for the first time – in the case of the new Reading Dashboard – we have been working with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to develop learning progressions and introduced Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs).



- SGPs measure student growth compared to academic peers
 allowing you to see how good it is
- Easily group students by ability or across classes
- Growth and Achievement Diagnostics
- Reading age vs. Chronological age and year end projections
- Reporting over time
- New visual representation of the Diagnostic Report, looking at the Comprehension, Quantity and Complexity of reading
- Maths Dashboard measures student growth using the Scaled Score
- Granular mapping of skills and domains in Reading and Maths through Core Progress™ learning progressions developed in conjunction with NFER

"This is what schools are looking for: a good methodology for establishing a baseline for reporting progress."

> Andy Grace, Principal, The Boulevard Academy

"We have found STAR to be the most precise analytical tool that we have ever seen."

Anthony Wilson, Deputy Head Teacher, Sir William Burrough Primary School

To help guide you through these significant changes we continue to host customer workshops at venues throughout the UK – and provide recorded webinars that can be viewed online at any time – both of which can be accessed from:



R NEW HBOARDS?





STAR Reading **STAR** Maths



SPOTLIGHT ON WEST LAKES ACADEMY

TOPICS COVERED

Intervention

Motivation

OFSTED

Progress monitoring

Situated in West Cumbria, West Lakes Academy is an average-sized school of approximately 1,000 students aged between 11 and 18 years old. Many students travel in from rural locations, some from as far as 15 miles away. The number of students eligible for Pupil Premium funding is slightly above average.

Gill Wharton, the school's librarian, describes the impact of Accelerated Reader on students' learning.

"We have had an improvement in literacy in all subjects"



We first implemented AR when our new Head Teacher suggested we try the scheme with 55 of our low ability students.

The results gave us the encouragement to roll it out with the rest of the year. We now have every class in Years 7, 8 & 9 using the programme, as well as some of our lower Year 10s and 11s. This is over 650 students

in total. Our aim with the programme is to improve each of our students' reading ability and get them reading books that are right for their reading age.

To launch the programme, we had an inset day in which we explained to all the staff how AR worked and the benefits of the scheme and how literacy is important in every subject. For parents, we sent a letter explaining what AR is and what we hoped to achieve with it. I also go to the Year 5 and 6 open evening to explain the programme, and to the Year 7 parents evening to answer any questions parents may have.

The programme makes sure that every student has a reading book – this is now standard academy equipment. English lessons have been changed to make sure that time is given to improving reading skills (need highlighted by AR assessment levels) and there is structured

targeted intervention for those that are struggling to make progress. We also have time to read in tutor periods.

We have each student's reading age on our SIMS programme so that every teacher can see it and plan their resources and lessons accordingly. All staff have received training on the reading ages of various texts to help with this, and they have all received phonics training to help them intervene effectively with weak readers.

they should be, and also talk to students who are progressing well.

We also use the results from the STAR Reading assessment to identify the students we feel would benefit from doing paired reading with 6th Formers. This scheme was commended in our OFSTED report last year. The biggest change I have seen in students is the confidence AR has given them to pick up a book and know they will be able to read it. I have also seen an increase in the use of the library. Each English class has a lesson in the library once every two weeks, and students are reading more for pleasure.

Teachers will talk with any students they feel are not doing as well as

The boys in particular love the sense of competition involved in passing tests and collecting points. Even reluctant male readers in Year 11, are now actively engaged in reading for pleasure and manage their own reading, swapping their books regularly even without staff having to tell them to!

When we were inspected by OFSTED, AR data helped us to demonstrate that we are aware of students' literacy abilities in fine detail. It showed that we are doing something to accelerate the progress of all readers, but particularly those whose reading ages are significantly below their chronological age. This was recognised in the OFSTED report.

Sixth form students are especially committed to their studies... they are excellent role models for younger students and make a good contribution to the overall aims of the academy and its smooth running, for example, through their involvement in paired reading with younger students. Reading is widely encouraged and students who fall behind in their reading get the support they need to catch up.

OFSTED report 2013 - 14 academic year

AR has had a huge impact on reading in our Academy. Students are much better at reading (according to AR scores) than students who have not been on the programme. As a result, we have had an improvement in literacy in all subjects across the Academy as well as very good exam results.



For more about providing books at every interest level, check out our blog post "Quizzing books to interest every reader" by Cecelia Powell, Renaissance Learning's Managing Editor, at:

NLT research shows positive impact of AR on students' reading habits

The National Literacy Trust has published its second independent report into the reading habits of students using Accelerated Reader.

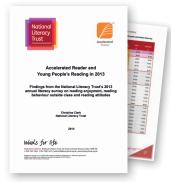


Part of a wider body of research into students' attitudes towards reading conducted nationwide in 2013, the 'Accelerated Reader and Young People's Reading' report studies the differences between students who use AR and those who do not. Survey responses of almost 30,000 students between the ages of eight and 16 were studied for the research.

The research was conducted by Dr Christina Clark, and follows a similar study last year that revealed similar differences in reading habits between AR users and their peers. The latest research reveals that the differences are particularly noticeable for students in Key Stage 4. While nearly a third (32.6%) of KS4 pupils who do not use AR say that they have not read a book in the past month, only a fifth (20.8%) of KS4 pupils who use AR say this.

The NLT study found that students who use Accelerated Reader are more likely to:

- enjoy reading
- have a favourite book
- read regularly at least once a week outside class
- agree that reading is cool
- agree that they will get a better job when they grow up if they are good at reading



Read the full report at renlearn.co.uk/ar-research

Customer workshops help hundreds of educators get the most out of STAR and AR

Over the past year, dozens of customer workshops have been held across the UK and Ireland. These one-day events are free to attend, and are held in regional locations to make them as easy to attend as possible.



The workshops are hosted by James Bell, Director of Professional Services at Renaissance Learning. James has been working with AR and STAR Assessments for 15 years and has an unrivalled knowledge of the programmes and how they are best used in the classroom.

Workshops introduce the Reading Dashboard (see page 6), Student Growth Percentiles and Core Progress learning progressions – the new measure for student growth recently introduced in the new STAR Assessments. Developed for the new national curriculum in collaboration with NFER, learning progressions help forge a clear link between assessment and instruction.

Other topics covered include raising student engagement with AR and tips on developing a culture of reading through a combination of AR and other initiatives.

Feedback from previous workshops suggests delegates enjoy networking with other local schools that are using the programmes, and sharing best practices with them. They also have the chance to speak to James and get one-to-one support in an informal setting. Because a significant part of the training covers the STAR Assessments, we recommend that a two-person team should attend: the AR Coordinator and a colleague responsible for assessment.

More events are being planned at venues across the UK. For details of upcoming workshops visit **renlearn.co.uk/events**

Recorded Webinars

Access previously recorded webinars on demand (running time approximately 45 minutes).

Watch online at renlearn.co.uk/webinars

Webinars available online include:

- Exploring the new Dashboard
- Getting the most out of STAR
- Bridging assessment and learning with the new STAR test

SPOTLIGHT ON EAST POINT ACADEMY

TOPICS COVERED

Certification

Motivation

OFSTED

Progress monitoring

Reading culture

East Point is a medium-sized academy in Lowestoft, Suffolk. The number of students eligible for pupil premium funding is above the national average, and over a fifth of students are supported by School Action Plus or have a statement of special educational needs.

More than twice the expected growth at East Point Academy



Mary-Jane King was a teacher in the school's English department when AR was first launched at East Point.

A below-average number of students achieved A*-C grades in English, and many students lacked the literacy skills to learn across the curriculum. "Many of our students had very low reading ages," Mary-Jane explains. "We launched AR because we wanted to engage students with reading and create a reading culture in the academy."

A colleague did the initial work of setting up the programme and getting it off the ground, but Mary-Jane took responsibility for it not long afterwards. The academy then joined the Renaissance School Partnership (RSP) programme, where a dedicated programme manager works closely with a school to implement AR successfully. "There was an element of trial and error when I first took over AR. I used a remote session with the programme manager to get some initial guidance and to help me identify the things I needed to focus on."

Data monitoring and remote training

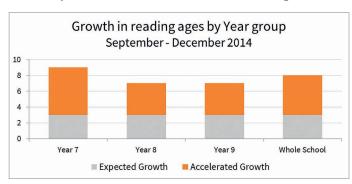
RSP provides schools with weekly data monitoring, unlimited remote training and a series of on-site consultation days that are tailored to the specific needs of the school. "On one of our consultation days, our programme manager met with the senior leadership team and informed them about the impact of the programme. She was able to show them what kind of data OFSTED was interested in seeing. When OFSTED came, we showed AR data for Pupil Premium students, showing the progress that group was making. They seemed quite impressed."

Mary-Jane's role has changed as AR has become more fully embedded in students' daily lives at East Point. Now Literacy Lead across the academy, Mary-Jane is responsible for raising literacy standards. With the support of the RSP programme manager, she has focused on working with staff to trickle down best practice that will help students to success. "Now my role is very much about engaging with staff. I print out reports and jot down handwritten comments about things they can focus on. The regular reports from our programme manager have been really useful in this because they highlight the things we need to work on, highlight the students at risk, and point out the next steps we need to take, which makes it easy to focus."

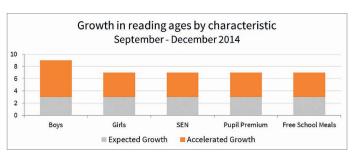
Strong growth in the second year

"We have renewed RSP for a second year because the programme has been really successful", Mary-Jane says. "Our programme manager has been brilliant and is really helpful, and the kids have become more engaged with reading as a result."

East Point Academy's second year as part of RSP has been even more successful than the first so far. The school has seen an average of eight months' growth in reading ages for the three months September – December. This remarkable achievement demonstrates how the ongoing training staff have received is helping them to implementing AR successfully, with clear benefits for their students' learning.

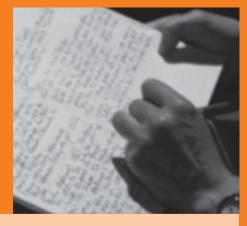


Breaking down the data by student characteristics shows that students are achieving strong growth regardless of their sex, although boys are progressing particularly well. Students on Free School Meals, those attracting Pupil Premium funding and those statemented for SEN have made over twice the progress expected.



These statistics show that the development of a reading culture and the ongoing training of staff yields strong results for all students, which will prepare them well for future learning.

Did you know it can take at least three months to write a quiz?



Kate Barton explains why.

Love it or hate it, it's the quiz writers' job to read whichever book needs a quiz - bright pink school-day romances, gangsters packing guns or misunderstood outcasts wallowing in angst.

This has been a benefit to both me and my readers: I have a better understanding of what my students should expect to encounter in a quiz; what skills they will develop; what kinds of titles are available to them...and why it takes so long to get these quizzes ready.

I always understood the frustration of waiting for books to get snapped up as 'quiz ready' and of keeping my keen quiz-takers waiting, but now I finally know why the wait is necessary.

High profile books tend to jump the queue a bit, which can push other items back. Jacqueline Wilson, Michael Morpurgo, Darren Shan, Karen McCombie et al will always trump Joe Bloggs. Famous book prizes have to get some priority treatment too;

World Book Day, the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Awards and many more tend to create bottlenecks in the quiz-writing schedule. School recommendations also leap up the priority queue and leave poor Joe Bloggs waiting patiently on his shelf for a little while longer.

Once the book is in the hands of a quiz writer, time is absorbed by the mechanics of getting a good quiz written and approved. We can't use too many words in the question and answers, or the reader loses the sense of what they are being asked. Everything has to be phrased in language appropriate to the setting and level of the book. The order of the questions has to synchronise with the events in the story. Those are the 'simple' parts of the process.

The question has to clearly define the moment in the story it is asking about. This may include using a variety of character names, place names, How / When / Why / What, and use a particular kind of 'approved syntax'.

Each type of question has its own difficulties. 'Why' is a minefield, because the reader must not be asked to infer facts in a reading

practice quiz (that's the domain of literacy skills). If the text doesn't explicitly state why, the guiz writer cannot fairly expect the reader to be certain.

'How' is not much less problematic; the pitfall is also expecting leaps of logic that are not actually described in the text.

If 'When' is similar to other times, it is useless; 'when they had dinner and argued', 'when they went to school and had lessons' which of the several similar moments in the story is the right one?



'What' ought to be straightforward - but suppose several things happen in close succession; consider crafting a question to lead clearly and inexorably to only the answer you seek.

When it comes to framing the correct answer, this must

utterly scream its rightness to those in the know, without standing out as an obvious choice to everyone else. Next, we must offer alternative answers of a kind that look entirely plausible but can never, even faintly, be mistaken for the correct one to someone who has actually read the book.

Once any issues with the questions have been addressed, a second editor will clean up and streamline the grammar and syntax. The changes get checked again, and then it is passed through a third edit and a last quality check. After that, it is finally ready to be submitted for approval and loaded on to the student-facing database by the software team, who do this for hundreds of books each term.

So despite seemingly simple questions and answers, it transpires that writing quizzes for the world's most widely used reading management software requires a combination of creativity, rigour, caffeine and determination. Considering that, the mere two to three months it usually takes from start to finish now seems far less a mystery and rather more a minor miracle.

Suggest a book to be quizzed!



Requests from librarians and teachers have always helped drive our selection of book titles for AR quizzes. Send your recommendations to renlearn.co.uk/quiz-suggestions



Kate Barton has used AR for several years in her role as a school librarian. She has also trained to be an AR Quiz Writer. In this article, she gives a unique insight into the mysterious art of quiz writing - and why it can take a while for quizzes to be made available.



Read more like this

Another of our Quiz Writers, Beverly Sanford, shares her experience of going from writing quizzes to writing books:

renlearn.co.uk/quiz-writer





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