

COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY GUIDES

Grades K-6

Read Alouds | Shared Reading | Small Group Reading Instruction | **Phonics**
Vocabulary | Fluency | Writing | Phonological Awareness |
Oral Language | Independent Reading



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OVERVIEW

In order to become fluent readers, students must have the ability to quickly and accurately recognize words. They also have to proficiently use oral and written vocabulary to convey meaning. Phonics is word study based on building sound/symbol connections and phonemic awareness is the beginning of phonics. A systematic approach to phonics provides time for students to practice, analyze and experiment with word patterns, develop automaticity with high frequency words and learn new words through orthographic mapping.

Orthographic mapping is the mental process that connects the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words to their corresponding letter(s) or letter patterns (graphemes) in written words. This allows readers to recognize words by sight without needing to decode them each time. Research by Linnea Ehri and David Kilpatrick has shown that this process is essential for developing fluent reading skills. This creates “automaticity” for automatic retrieval of words/sounds.

CURRICULUM CORRELATIONS

Phonics Organizing Idea:

Foundational literacy is supported by understanding relationships between sounds in oral language and the letters that represent them.

- **Kindergarten Learning Outcome:** Children make connections between letters and sounds in words.
- **Grade 1 Learning Outcome:** Students recognize and analyze letters and sounds in words.
- **Grade 2 Learning Outcome:** Students apply understandings of letter combinations and sounds in words
- **Grade 3 Learning Outcome:** Students investigate how phonics connects to word formation and supports the processes of reading and writing.

CONSIDERATIONS - PLANNING

Conclusions of the National Reading Panel (2000) noted the following regarding phonics instruction:

- *...systematic phonics instruction makes a more significant contribution to children's growth in reading than do alternative programs providing unsystematic or no phonics instruction (p. 2-132)*
- *...systematic phonics instruction produces the biggest impact on growth in reading when it begins in kindergarten or 1st grade before children have learned to read independently...and must begin with foundational knowledge involving letters and phonemic awareness. (p. 2-133)*
- *...systematic phonics instruction is significantly more effective than non-phonics instruction in helping to prevent reading difficulties among at-risk students and in helping to remediate reading difficulties in disabled readers. (p. 2-133)*
- *Growth in reading comprehension is... boosted by systematic phonics instruction for younger students (to grade one) and reading disabled students. (p. 2-134)*
- *Students taught systematic phonics outperformed students who were taught a variety of nonsystematic or non-phonics programs, including basal programs, whole language approaches, and whole word programs. (p. 2-134)*
- *...it is important to emphasize that systematic phonics instruction should be integrated with other reading instruction to create a balanced reading program. **Phonics instruction is never a total reading program** (and) should not become the dominant component in a reading program... (and)...It is important to evaluate children's reading competence in many ways... (p. 2-136)*



PHONICS COMPANION SCOPE & SEQUENCE

([*The Phonics Companion: 120 Lessons for Teachers*](#). Georgiou/Dunn, 2023)

- developed according to the frequency of the letter-sound correspondences in children's books
- teacher feedback on groups of letter-sound correspondences that go together

SIGHT WORDS/HIGH FREQUENCY WORDS (and Tier 1 & Tier 2 words)

- [High Frequency Word Lists-K, 1, 2](#) (Alberta Education, ELAL): These lists are only accessible through a log-in onto the Alberta Education K-6 site.
- [Irregular "Heart" Words \(UFLI Foundations\), 2024, University of Florida Literacy Institute](#). "Heart Words" are words that cannot be easily decoded until the sound/symbols have been taught. Words are "temporarily irregular" until they are taught and there are a few words that are "permanently irregular". Heart Words are taught throughout the UFLI program.
- [Word Study for Phonics, Spelling and Vocabulary Instruction \(formally Words Their Way\) 2024. Bear, Templeton, Johnston. Pearson U.S.](#) provides pacing and sequencing guides as well as lists of patterns, high frequency words and words where students frequently experience difficulty for all levels of spellers. Consider which words should be prioritized for students, e.g, frequently occurring words, conversational vocabulary, and formal, academic vocabulary.
- Instruction, practice, and assessment should continually loop back and review previously taught words. Students could create a journal where they create a phrase or sentence using each new high- frequency word. The growing list is then read out loud once a week (in class, to a family member, to the teacher) in order to provide ongoing exposure.
- Watch for letters and words students use but confuse and other inconsistencies. Build from what they know. Avoid teaching confusing letters

at the same time that have similar shapes (e.g., e, a, s, c and n, m, u, h and r).

- Word Walls can be created to support student learning; focus on words commonly used in reading and writing. Word walls can also be developed in subject specific areas, e.g., a math word wall.
- Most students need 8-12 exposures to a word to commit it to memory, but struggling readers need 50 or more exposures. (Blevins, 2016).
- Three Tiers of Vocabulary: This is not a list meant for Phonics Instruction, words can be categorized into [Three Tiers of Vocabulary \(Alberta Education\)](#). These do not need to be taught as Phonics Instruction, but some words, particularly in Tier 1, may be applicable. The focus for these words would come under [Vocabulary in the Alberta Education ELAL Curriculum](#):
 - › **Tier 1** features basic every-day vocabulary (e.g., dog, table, clock, food).
 - › **Tier 2** can be academic words, but not discipline specific; more likely to be encountered in classrooms rather than conversations and should be taught directly (e.g., relative, analyze, and define).
 - › **Tier 3** involves low frequency, discipline specific vocabulary (e.g. photosynthesis and circumference)



SNAPSHOT

"The ultimate goal of reading instruction is that the reader attains fluency and comprehends text."

P. Antonacci & C. O'Callaghan, 50 Research-Based Strategies for K-8 Learners-Promoting Literacy Development, Sage, 2012

Systematic, explicit instruction in letter-sound relationships is considered best practice in phonics instruction and builds word recognition and fluency... what is referred to as, "breaking the code".

Pressley, M (2006) Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching. New Year, Guilford (Links to the entire book on Google Books)

K. Norman and R. Calfee (2004). Tile test: A hand-on approach for assessing phonics in early grades. The Reading Teacher, 58, 42-53.

SYSTEMATIC PHONIC INSTRUCTION

Anita Archer & C. Hughes noted (2011) in Explicit instruction: Effective and efficient teaching. Guilford Press, noted:

Explicit teaching follows a format, logical sequence, routine and resources:

- Review of previous material
- Phonological awareness warm-up
- Goals
- Teacher-led practice
- Student-led practice (supervised) with feedback
- Dictation with the taught orthographic pattern
- Supported reading of connected text (including vocabulary/reading comprehension)
- Writing connected to passage

SOME SUGGESTED SYSTEMATIC PROGRAMS & STRATEGIES

- UFLI Foundations: Systematic Phonics Program. University of Florida Literacy Institute.
- The Phonics Companion (2023). George Georgious, Kristy Dunn. Pearson.
- Phonics and Spelling Through Phoneme-

Grapheme Mapping (2022). Kathryn Grace. Really Great Reading.

- Word Study for Phonics, Spelling, and Vocabulary Instruction (formerly Words Their Way™), 7th edition
- Foundational Literacy Skills (Pearson Canada). Various materials.
- Phonics for Reading, Anita Archer (2023). i-Ready. This program is meant for older students with reading challenges including: ELL, diagnosed learning challenges, intervention past grade 4.
- Section II-Essential Strategies for Teaching Phonics (P. Antonacci & C. O'Callaghan, 50 Research-Based Strategies for K-8 Learners-Promoting Literacy Development, Sage, 2012
- Word Study Instruction: Ideas to support word study in the K-2 Classroom. (Reading Rockets, 2025). Excerpted from a longer article: Williams, C., Phillips-Birdsong, C., Hufnagel, K., Hungler, D., & Lundstrom, R.P. (2009, April). Word Study Instruction in the K-2 Classroom. The Reading Teacher, 62(7), 570-578.
 - › **Tip 1:** Assess students' word knowledge using multiple assessment tools.
 - › **Tip 2:** Use a homogeneous small-group approach to instruction.
 - › **Tip 3:** Carve out time to prepare for word study instruction.
 - › **Tip 4:** Teach word knowledge, not just words.
 - › **Tip 5:** Demonstrate how word study can be used during reading and writing.
 - › **Tip 6:** Teach strategies that support students' use of word study instruction.
- The Fountas & Pinnell Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study System



INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING PHONICS

When identifying which Phonics activities would be appropriate for each grade, consult the KUSPs (Knowledge, Understandings and Skills and Procedures) in the ELAL Curriculum.

The Knowledge and Skills and Procedures will focus on curriculum needs and activities (KUSPs) that support students in meeting the Learning Outcome. Below you will find one KUSP example from each grade level:

Kindergarten KUSP Example:

KNOWLEDGE	UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS & PROCEDURES
The English alphabet consists of a set of 26 letters. Letters have distinguishable characteristics, including - height - shape - straight lines - curved lines Letters can be upper case or lower case.	Letters come in many shapes and sizes.	Identify letters by characteristics. Recognize most upper case and lower case letters by name.

Grade One KUSP Example:

KNOWLEDGE	UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS & PROCEDURES
The English alphabet consists of a set of 26 letters that represent sounds. Letters can be upper case or lower case.	Letters represent sounds in words.	Recognize both upper case and lower case letters of the alphabet fluently. Distinguish between letters that are consonants and letters that are vowels. Make connections between letters and sounds in words.

Grade Two KUSP Example:

KNOWLEDGE	UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS & PROCEDURES
Letter combinations and sounds for reading include - vowels - blends - digraphs - diphthongs Blends combine sounds or word parts. A combination of two letters can make a single sound (digraph). Long vowel sounds can be made by gliding from one position of the mouth to another within the same syllable (diphthong). Letters in words can be silent. Some letters have variable pronunciations. A vowel that is followed by <r> can make a new sound (e.g., ti-ger).	Relationships between letter combinations and sounds support understanding of words.	Make connections between a full range of letter combinations and sounds. Apply knowledge of silent letters when learning new words. Recognize and use a wide range of consonant letters and letter combinations in the beginning, middle, and ending of words. Recognize and use letter combinations that represent long vowel sounds. Recognize how the letter <r> can influence the vowel sound. Read words that include the 120 most frequent letter-sound correspondences.

Grade Three KUSP Example:

KNOWLEDGE	UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS & PROCEDURES
Letter combinations and sounds for reading include - vowels - blends - digraphs - diphthongs Blends combine sounds or word parts. A combination of two letters can make a single sound (digraph). Long vowel sounds can be made by gliding from one position of the mouth to another within the same syllable (diphthong). Letters in words can be silent. Some letters have variable pronunciations. A vowel that is followed by <r> can make a new sound (e.g., ti-ger).	Relationships between letter combinations and sounds support understanding of words.	Make connections between a full range of letter combinations and sounds. Apply knowledge of silent letters when learning new words. Recognize and use a wide range of consonant letters and letter combinations in the beginning, middle, and ending of words. Recognize and use letter combinations that represent long vowel sounds. Recognize how the letter <r> can influence the vowel sound. Read words that include the 120 most frequent letter-sound correspondences.

Word Sorts

Using Word Sorts to Help Students Recognize Word Patterns (Reading Horizons, updated April 2024)

- Sort beginning sounds
- Sort Digraphs from Blends
- Sort long vowels from short vowels
- Sort words with closed syllables from words with open syllables
- Sort words that double the ending consonant before adding -ing with those that do not
- Sort prefixes and suffixes
- Sort base words and root words

Word Matrix

Consider moving into creating a "Word Matrix" to begin to build morphological awareness. [Structured Word Inquiry: Instruction for building literacy and critical thinking for learners of all ages and abilities](#) (2010). Dr. Peter Bowers and Dr. John Kirby. [WordWorks Literacy Centre](#).

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A FEW THOUGHTS FROM EDUCATIONAL EXPERTS:

The idea that English is too mixed up to make sense of is a myth.

- Moats states: "...50% of English words can be spelled accurately based on straightforward sound-letter correspondences, and an additional

34% are predictable except for one sound. This means that about 84% of English words follow regular spelling patterns, leaving only around 4% as truly irregular.” ([*How Spelling Supports Reading: And Why It Is More Regular and Predictable Than You May Think*](#). Reading Rockets (Winter 2005–2006) American Educator.

- The correlation between spelling and reading comprehension is high because both depend on a common denominator: proficiency with language. The more deeply and thoroughly a student knows a word, the more likely he or she is to recognize it, spell it, define it, and use it appropriately in speech and writing. The major goal of the English writing system is not merely to ensure accurate pronunciation of the written word – it is to convey meaning. If words that sound the same (e.g., rain, rein and reign) were spelled the same way, their meanings would be harder to differentiate. (Joshi, Tremain, Carreker & Moats, 2008)
- When doing Word Work, focus on spelling and vocabulary comprehension work. This supports a rich literacy environment that provides essential practice time. (Boushey, G., & Moser, J. (2006). *The Daily 5: Fostering Literacy Independence in the Elementary Grades*. Stenhouse Publishers)
- The size of a child’s vocabulary is an accurate predictor of academic achievement and even upward mobility over the course of a lifetime. (E.D.Hirsch (2013). [*A Wealth of Words: The key to increasing upward mobility is expanding vocabulary*](#)).

DESIGNER OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TIPS

Basic implementation would look like this...

- Word work occurs daily within a systematic approach.
- Weekly spelling assessments should be focused on the instruction that took place during the week. Formal word lists to study are no longer sent home, but words can go home that support the focus on phonics for the week...these do not make up the “spelling test” at school.

A more impactful implementation would look like this...

- Small group instruction: create different groupings per class. Word work is differentiated.
- Early grades focus predominantly on phonemic awareness and connecting to graphemes (letters)/
- Through SOUND WALLS students develop their own personal sound/symbol words that can be kept in a file folder or personal dictionary.

Students who have the basics mastered and could go the extra mile, might look like this...

- Word work is purposeful, intentional, personalized and tied to cross-curricular vocabulary.
- Teachers guide students to identify patterns, and look for connections to sounds, meanings (etymology), structure (morphology) and related words.
- Foster transfer to student writing.
- Vocabulary strategies are embedded in all content areas.
- Teachers add new levels of challenge with timed sorts, word ladders, word play and challenging apps and games.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment is necessary to identify student needs in order to conduct progress monitoring and to inform instruction.

Assessment of students’ word knowledge can be done using informal spelling inventories and/or analysis of students’ independent writing; however, it is important to assess using tools designed to diagnostically identify needs and successes. The following tools are used to identify phonics and sound/symbol (phonemic awareness) needs in K–3 classrooms (and older grades when needed):

- Literacy assessments: These tools combined together are referred to as the government-provided literacy screening assessment. Details regarding their use in Kindergarten to Grade 3 are available on page 5 under the section titled Administration of government provided literacy

and numeracy screening assessments. (These can be accessed through the [Provincial Assessment Hub](#) through Learn Alberta and your log-on is required):

- › PAST: The Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST)
 - › LeNS: Letter Name-Sound Test
 - › CC3: Castles and Coltheart 3 based on the Castles and Coltheart Reading Test 2 (CC2)
 - › CORE Phonics Survey (CORE Learning)
- For a complete list of assessments, see the [General Information Bulletin 2024-2025: Literacy and Numeracy Screening Assessments](#) (Alberta Education, 2024).
- Other assessments are available including:
 - › UFLI Spelling Assessment (UFLI Foundations Manual, 2020)
 - › [Schonell Spelling](#) (requires sign-up)
 - › [DIBELS, 8th Edition. Assessment Materials \(free edition\). University of Oregon.](#) *Note: Schools, school districts and multi-district agencies may use the DIBELS Materials (free) solely for internal educational use.

Spelling Apps:

- [Spelling City](#) – learning activities and games with various apps to choose from.
- [Word Searcher](#) – Neil Ramsden

SEE IT IN ACTION



[Heart Method for Sight Words](#)

PaTTAN, May 18, 2018

[Structured Word Inquiry \(SWI\)](#)

Peter Bowers, December 2019

[Level Up Phonics: How to Teach Advanced Word Study in Grades 3-5](#)

Anna DiGillio, May 6, 2025

[“Why Make the Switch? Transitioning from Word Walls to Sound Walls”](#)

Marjorie Bottari, 2020, Heggerty Blog, 2020.

[“Transitioning from Word Walls to Sound Walls”](#)

Marjorie Bottari, 2020. Reading Rockets. (Videos at the end)

[Make Spelling Joyful Through Scientific Inquiry](#)

Peter Bowers, August 29, 2019, TEDxYouth@The NuevaSchool

[Choosing Words for the Classroom Word Wall](#)

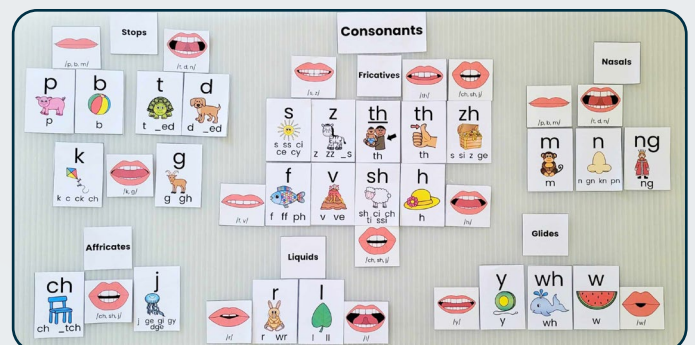
Caroline Musselwhite, Alberta Professional Learning Consortium, April 30, 2016

If you use a Word Wall take a look at this video.

MODIFICATIONS, SUPPORTS & TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

Use assistive technologies, predictive word tools, Read Write Google, apps such as Word Wizard and Phonics Genius

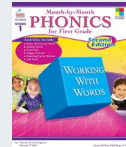
- [UFLI Blending Board and Word Work Map](#) (virtual). 2021
- [Using Digital Technologies to Support Word Study Instruction.](#) (2014). R. McQuirter Scott. Student Achievement Division and the Ontario Association of Deans of Education.
- [Learn That Word: Your Vocabulary and Spelling Solution](#)
- [Membean Root Word](#) (upper grades)
- [Mini-Matrix-Maker.](#) Neil Ramsden
- [Online Etymology Dictionary](#)



RESOURCES

[Florida Centre for Reading Research Student Centre Activities \(K-5 \(can be seen as Canadian K-6\)\).](#) Activities surround the 5 Pillars of Reading: Phonemic Awareness, PHONICS, Vocabulary, Comprehension. A collection of games and activities can be accessed for each area of need/practice and can be used in Literacy Centres. Lesson plans for teachers support word work.

Cunningham, P. M., & Hall, D. P. (1997). [Month-by-month phonics for second grade.](#) Four Blocks. (On amazon.ca books available for Grades K-4 as well as Phonics and Vocabulary for Grades 4-6).



Sprenger, M. (2017). [101 Strategies to make academic vocabulary stick.](#) Alexandria, VA: ASCD.



[Comprehensive Phonics, Spelling and Word Study Guide \(2017\).](#) Fountas & Pinnell. Includes detailed explanations with regards to the nine areas of learning: Early Literacy Concepts, Phonological Awareness, Letter Knowledge, Letter-Sound Relationships, Spelling Patterns, High-Frequency Words, Word Meaning/Vocabulary, Word Structure and Word-Solving Actions.

