

Sadlier® School

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES**

# 10 Common Causes of Phonics Instruction Failure

**Wiley Blevins, EdD**

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# INTRODUCTION

Once phonics instructional materials and assessments are in place, the hard work begins. Too often, the implementation of these materials and resources fails due to common issues or obstacles, such as those listed below (Blevins, 2017, 2011, 2006, 2001). Great care was taken to avoid these common obstacles in the creation of the Sadlier *From Phonics to Reading*™ program.



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## 1

# INADEQUATE OR NON-EXISTENT REVIEW AND REPETITION CYCLE

**Learn and Blend**  
Directions: Listen and join in.

A as in ant.  
A as in late.  
A as in apron, pay, and wait.

**Long a**  
a ai  
ay a\_e

**Blend It**  
Directions: Choral read the words.

**INTRODUCE**

1. ran	rain	plan	plain	sad	say
2. may	pay	play	say	stay	stray
3. pail	sail	tail	trail	train	brain
4. chain	tray	faint	nail	paint	raise
5. "Rain, rain, go away," yelled Gail.					
6. I had to wait all day for the train to come.					

**REVIEW**

7. go	she	hope	cute	ride	same
8. bring	ranch	chop	sink	pitch	when

**CHALLENGE**

9. rain	rainbow	day	birthday
---------	---------	-----	----------

**Daily Practice**  
Directions: Do one activity each day. Then check the box.

- ☐ **Build Fluency:** Read the words each day by yourself and to a partner.
- ☐ **Mark It:** Circle all the words with *a*. Underline all the words with *ay*.
- ☐ **Spell It:** Have a partner say each word. Write the word. Check your answer.
- ☐ **Write About It:** Use the words to create a story. Draw a box around the words from the list that you used.

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Lesson 15 • Long a 211

**Cumulative Assessment**

**Fluency Check**  
Directions: Listen to the child read the word list. Mark one check in the green box if the word is read correctly (accuracy). Mark another check in the blue box if it is read automatically (fluency).

CUMULATIVE ASSESSMENT			
Lesson	Word		
15	brain	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	gray	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	sway	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	paintbrush	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	we	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	hi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	go	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	she	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	rope	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	hoping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	these	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	huge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	bake	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	side	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	place	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	fine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	long	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	bank	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	sunk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	string	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	chip	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	when	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	bunch	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	matching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Number Correct (accuracy): \_\_\_\_/24  
Number Automatic (fluency): \_\_\_\_/24

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224 Long a • Lesson 15

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Level A, Student Edition

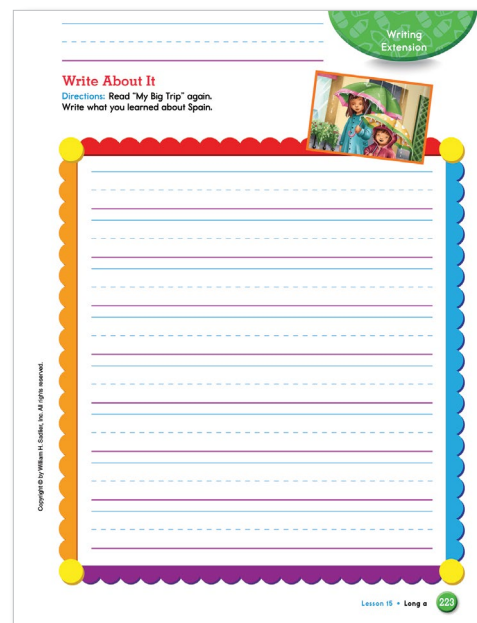
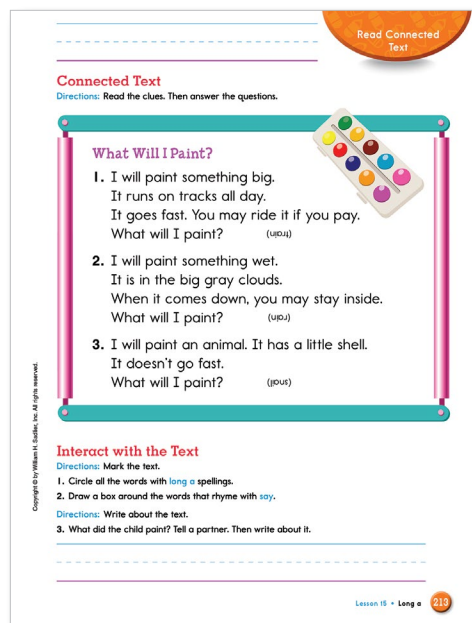
We underestimate the amount of time it takes young learners to master phonics skills. When a new skill is introduced it should be systematically and purposefully reviewed for the next four to six weeks. The goal must be to teach to mastery rather than just exposure. Only then can students transfer these skills to new reading situations. With the fast pacing of most curricula, a more substantial review and repetition cycle must be added.

Increasing opportunities to practice through additional words in blending lines, dictation, and repeated readings of previously-read decodable stories is essential and is a key part of the *From Phonics to Reading* materials.

## 2

## LACK OF APPLICATION TO REAL READING AND WRITING EXPERIENCES

Students progress at a much faster rate in phonics when the bulk of instructional time is spent on applying the skills to authentic reading and writing experiences, rather than isolated skill-and-drill work. The majority of the lesson time in the *From Phonics to Reading* program is devoted to application exercises. Students are reading and writing daily.



*From Phonics to Reading*  
Level A, Student Edition



# 3

## INAPPROPRIATE READING MATERIALS TO PRACTICE SKILLS



*From Phonics to Reading  
Level A, Student Edition*

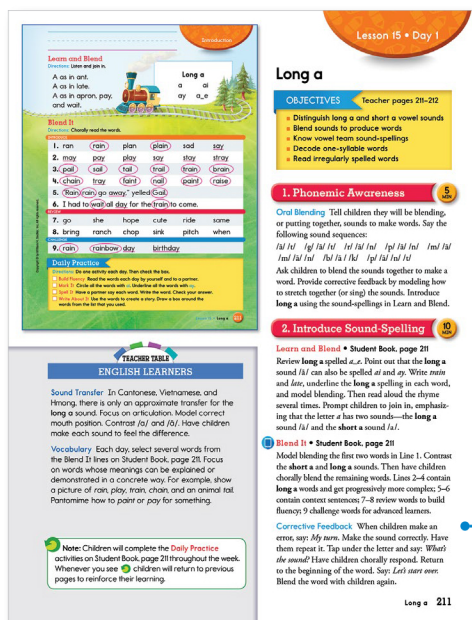
The connection between what we teach and what we have young learners read has a powerful effect on their word-reading strategies (Juel and Roper-Schneider, 1985) and their phonics and spelling skills (Blevins, 2000). It also affects their motivation to read. Examine a few pages from the books you give your students to read in K–1 during phonics lessons. They should be able to sound out over fifty percent of these words based on the phonics skills you have taught them up to that point. If not, more controlled accountable text will be needed until they get more phonics skills under their belts and develop a sense of comfort and control in their reading abilities. You can usually transition to more challenging text in the second half of Grade 1.

Ample accountable text (containing words that can be sounded out, high-frequency words taught, and story words to create comprehensible and natural-sounding text) is included in the *From Phonics to Reading* materials.

# 4 INEFFECTIVE USE OF THE GRADUAL RELEASE MODEL

Teachers of struggling readers often spend too much of the instructional time doing the “heavy lifting,” such as over-modeling and having students simply repeat.

Whoever does the thinking in a lesson, does the learning. Students might struggle, but you are there to provide corrective feedback and support. Limit “parrot” activities to a minimum when implementing the phonics lessons.



**Corrective Feedback** When children make an error, say: *My turn.* Make the sound correctly. Have them repeat it. Tap under the letter and say: *What's the sound?* Have children chorally respond. Return to the beginning of the word. Say: *Let's start over.* Blend the word with children again.

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Level A, Teacher's Edition

## 5

TOO MUCH TIME LOST  
DURING **TRANSITION**

Phonics lessons often require a lot of manipulatives and materials. Transitional times when materials are distributed or collected should be viewed as valuable instructional moments in which review skills can be addressed (e.g., sing the ABC song, do a phonemic awareness task, review sound-letter action rhymes, spell aloud high-frequency words to focus students' attention on an instructional goal). Plan these transitions at the beginning of the week (e.g., select three to four great transitions per week) to better utilize your phonics instructional minutes.





# 6 LIMITED TEACHER KNOWLEDGE OF RESEARCHED-BASED PHONICS ROUTINES AND LINGUISTICS



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Level A, Teacher's Edition

Teachers with a background in phonics or linguistics are better equipped to make meaningful instructional decisions, analyze student errors, and improve the language and delivery of instruction.

Also, teacher attitudes toward phonics instructional materials (e.g., decodable text) and routines (e.g., sorts, word building, blending) matter. These need to be explored within grade-level teams. Use the professional development resources in the *From Phonics to Reading* program to build foundational skill teaching capacity.

# 7 INAPPROPRIATE PACING OF LESSONS



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Teachers often spend too much time on activities they enjoy or are easier for students and less on the more challenging or “meaty” activities that increase learning. Keep lessons fast-paced and rigorous. Use the suggested times as a guideline and work towards increasing the pace of activities that might take longer. Phonics should be fun, with students active and engaged during the entire lesson—thinking and talking about how words work. The bulk of time should be devoted to “real reading and writing” experiences.

## 8

# NO COMPREHENSIVE OR CUMULATIVE MASTERY ASSESSMENT TOOLS

**Cumulative Assessment**

**Fluency Check**

Directions: Listen to the child read the word list. Mark one check in the green box if the word is read correctly (accuracy). Mark another check in the blue box if it is read automatically (fluency).

CUMULATIVE ASSESSMENT			
Lesson	Word		
17	soap	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	slowly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	loaf	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	flown	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	bean	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	seeds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	brain	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	gray	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	sway	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	paintbrush	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	we	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	hi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	go	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	she	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	rope	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	hoping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	these	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	huge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	bake	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	side	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	place	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	fine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Number Correct (accuracy): \_\_\_\_/24

Number Automatic (fluency): \_\_\_\_/24

259 Long • Lesson 17

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Level A, Student Edition

Assessment of phonics skills must be done over an extended period of time to ensure mastery. Weekly assessments focusing on one skill often give “false positives.” That is, they show movement toward learning, but not mastery. If the skill isn’t worked on for subsequent weeks, learning can decay. Cumulative assessments, like those provided in the *From Phonics to Reading* materials, help you determine which skills have truly been mastered. Make course corrections and adjust small group differentiated support based on your findings.

## 9

# TRANSITIONING TO MULTISYLLABIC WORDS TOO LATE

## TEACHER TABLE INTERVENTION

**Address Learning Gaps** Based on your weekly cumulative assessments, meet each day with children who have not mastered previously taught skills. Repeat the blending, dictation, and connected text reading pages. Focus on application of the skills to authentic reading and writing experiences, rather than skill-and-drill exercises. Application activities will accelerate learning.

Most curricula focus on one-syllable words in Grade 2, yet the stories students read at that grade are filled with more challenging, multisyllabic words. More emphasis needs to be given to transitioning to longer words at this grade (e.g., going from known to new words like can/candle and teaching the six major syllable types). The *From Phonics to Reading* materials provide a smoother, easier, and more focused transition to multisyllabic words for these early readers.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

**Learn and Blend**

**Long o**  
oa ow o\_e oe o

**Blend It**  
Chorally read the words.

**CHECK FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS**

1. hop	hope	flat	float	go	goes
2. globe	those	vote	coat	coast	coach
3. grow	snow	known	toe	sold	most

**TRANSITION TO LONGER WORDS**

4. low	below	load	unload	yellow	window
5. snow	snowman	told	retold	tadpole	explode

**CHALLENGE**

6. microphone	microscope	overflow	video	radio	suppose
7. some	move	none	gone	love	whose

**READING IN CONTEXT**

8. Joe's old phone broke about a week ago.  
9. We took a video while boating along the coast.

**Daily Practice**  
Do one activity each day. Then check the box.

- ☐ **Build Fluency** Read the words each day by yourself and to a partner.
- ☐ **Mark It** Circle all the words with **long o** spelled **oa**. Underline all the words with **long o** spelled **ow**.
- ☐ **Spell It** Have a partner say each word. Write the word. Check your answer.
- ☐ **Write About It** Use the words to create a story. Draw a box around words from the list that you used.

Lesson 3 • Long o 25

From Phonics to Reading  
Level B, Student Edition

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

**Learn and Blend**

**I-Blends**  
bl cl fl  
gl pl sl

**r-Blends**  
br cr dr  
fr gr pr tr

**s-Blends**  
sc sk sl sm  
sn sp st sw

**Blend It**  
Directions: Chorally read the words.

**CHECK FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS**

1. lap	clap	back	black	lip	flip
2. rip	drip	cab	crab	tuck	truck
3. top	stop	sell	smell	sack	snack

**TRANSITION TO LONGER WORDS**

4. spell	spelling	stack	stacking	cross	crossing
5. spot	spotless	frost	frostbite	drop	droplets

**CHALLENGE**

6. classroom	slippery	springtime	flashlight	streetcar	grasshopper
7. playground	blizzard	president	dragonfly	crossword	breakfast

**READING IN CONTEXT**

8. Brad put a green and red flag on his truck.  
9. Stan got to swim on his trip to Florida.

**Daily Practice**  
Directions: Do one activity each day. Then check the box.

- ☐ **Build Fluency** Read the words each day by yourself and to a partner.
- ☐ **Mark It** Circle all the words with **i-blends**. Underline all the words with **r-blends**.
- ☐ **Spell It** Have a partner say each word. Write the word. Check your answer.
- ☐ **Write About It** Use the words to create a story. Draw a box around words from the list that you used.

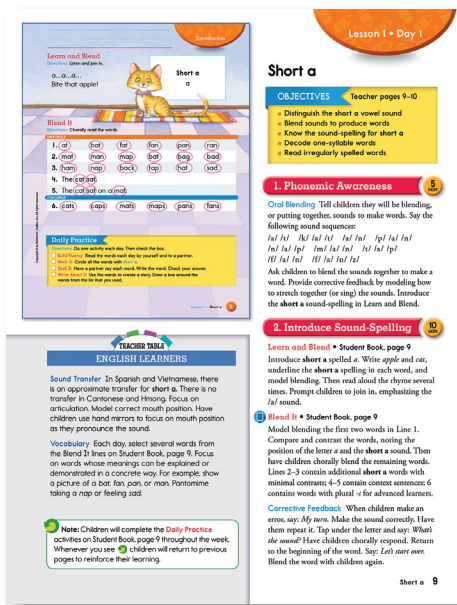
Lesson 4 • i-Blends, r-Blends, s-Blends 39

From Phonics to Reading  
Level C, Student Edition



# 10

## OVERDOING IT (ESPECIALLY ISOLATED SKILL WORK)



*From Phonics to Reading*  
Level A, Teacher's Edition

Some curricula over-emphasize phonics (especially the isolated skill type of work), while ignoring other key aspects of early reading needs (e.g., vocabulary and background knowledge building) that are essential to long-term reading progress. These skills plant the seeds for comprehension as students encounter increasingly more complex texts with words not commonly used in speaking and topics that require more extensive background knowledge.

Modify your reading time to provide better balance. Increase read aloud time each day (e.g., two read-alouds per day—one literary and one informational) to feed students with words and ideas. This will have greater long-term benefits.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Wiley Blevins** studied at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Bowling Green State University and has his doctorate in Education. He is an author, educational consultant, and researcher and has taught both in the United States and South America.

Wiley has written over 17 books for teachers, including *A Fresh Look at Phonics*, *Phonics From A to Z*, and *Choosing and Using Decodable Texts*, and he has authored several phonics and reading programs including Sadlier's *From Phonics to Reading*. He also wrote the phonics brief by the International Literacy Association, *Meeting the Challenges of Early Literacy Phonics Instruction* and has penned over 100 children's books. Wiley's current focus is on adaptive technology, differentiated professional development, and children's literature. He is SVP and Associate Publisher at Reycraft Books, a new imprint focused on publishing books by authors and illustrators from under-represented groups.

*From Phonics to Reading* for Grades K–3, authored by Wiley, is a Tier 1 program that aligns with the Science of Reading research and was recognized as a high-quality foundational skills program by EdReports. See complete review [here](#). Embedded professional development in the program, along with a critical review and repetition cycle, make early reading mastery possible for every student. Wiley has three complementary *From Phonics to Reading* programs: the *Interactive Practice Bundle* for practicing and applying newly taught skills; the *Fluency Booster Practice Book*, which provides a variety of practice for building fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills; and *Interactive Assessments*, offering diagnostic, formative (Lesson), and summative (Unit) assessments in an interactive format online. His newest program is *Building Reading Success with Wiley Blevins*, a Tier 2 & Tier 3 intervention program for Grades K–5. Grounded in the latest science of reading research, it offers a systematic and explicit approach to literacy and seamlessly integrates into any classroom setting.

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[Research Basis for \*From Phonics to Reading\*: A Research Study on the Effects of Using Decodable Texts with Systematic Phonics Instruction](#)

[Influential Reading Group Makes It Clear: Students Need Systematic, Explicit Phonics, EdWeek](#)

[Phonics Instructional Guide: Multiple Tiers for Success eBook](#)

[Phonics Assessment eBook](#)

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## REFERENCES



You might also be interested in:

*From Phonics to Reading*, authored by Wiley Blevins, is a research-based foundational skills program aligned with the Science of Reading.

Visit [www.SadlierSchool.com/WileyPrograms](http://www.SadlierSchool.com/WileyPrograms) to see more programs that are aligned with the Science of Reading to use together or as stand-alone supplements.

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