## Sadlier. School PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES

## Seven Key Characteristics of Strong Phonics Instruction

Wiley Blevins, EdD
www.SadierSchool.com/FPR

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ..... 3
Readiness Skills ..... 4
Scope and Sequence ..... 5
Blending ..... 6
Dictation ..... 7
Word Awareness. ..... 8
High-Frequency Words ..... 9
Reading Connected Text ..... 10
Conclusion ..... 11
References ..... 12
About the Author ..... 13
Related Program ..... Back Cover

## INTRODUCTION

The important role of phonics in building the necessary foundational skills for reading has been well documented by research over the past 60 years (Chall, 1967; Anderson et al, 1985; Adams, 1990; Snow et al, 1998; NICHD 2000; Hattie, 2012; Wong, 2015). But not all phonics instruction is equal. In addition to being explicit and systematic, strong phonics instruction must include seven key ingredients for student success (Blevins, 2017, 2011, 2006, 2001). These include the following and are cornerstones of the Sadlier From Phonics to Reading ${ }^{\text {TM }}$ program.


## READINESS SKILLS

## 1. Phonemic Awareness

5
Oral Segmentation Tell children they will be segmenting, or breaking apart, words. Say the following words, one at a time: bud; cup; hum; mud; fuss; nuts; runs; hums. Ask children to segment each word sound by sound, then count the number of sounds. Provide corrective feedback by modeling how to segment the word using sound boxes and counters. Stretch the sounds in the word. Place one counter in each box as you move from sound to sound.

## 1. Phonemic Awareness

Oral Blending Tell children they will be blending, or putting together, sounds to make words. Say the following sound sequences:
/u/ /s/ /k/ /u/ /t/ /h/ /u/ /m/ /l/ /u/k/ /r/ /u/ /n/ /h/ /u/ /g/ /h//u/ /g/ /z/
Ask children to blend the sounds together to make a word. Provide corrective feedback by modeling how to stretch together (or sing) the sounds. Introduce the short $\mathbf{u}$ sound-spelling in Learn and Blend.

From Phonics to Reading Level A, Teacher's Edition

The two best predictors of early reading success are phonemic awareness and alphabet recognition (Adams, 1990; Beck and Juel, 1995; Chall, 1996; Stanovich, 1992). These skills open the gate for reading. Without a deep knowledge of the English letters and an awareness that words are made up of sounds, students cannot learn to read.

Phonemic awareness is the understanding that words are made up of a series of discrete sounds, called phonemes. A range of subskills is taught to develop phonemic awareness with oral blending and oral segmentation having the most positive impact on reading and writing development. These skills are known as the power skills (Blevins 2017; Reutzel, 2015) and are the emphasis of instruction.

Alphabet recognition involves learning the names, shapes, and sounds of the letters of the alphabet with fluency (Bear, Templeton, Invernizzi, and Johnston, 1996). Phonemic awareness and alphabet recognition are focused on primarily in Kindergarten and Grade 1.

# SCOPE AND SEQUENCE 



From Phonics to Reading

A strong scope and sequence builds from the simple to the complex in a way that takes advantage of previous learning. The sequence allows for many words to be formed as early as possible and focuses on teaching high-utility skills before less useful sound spellings (Hanna, Hodges, Hanna, and Rudolph, 1966).

The sequence also has built-in review and repetition to ensure mastery over time. While there is no "right" scope and sequence, programs that strive to connect concepts and move through a series of skills in a stair-step way offer the best chance at student success.

The phonics in the From Phonics to Reading sequence teaches new skills and concepts in this manner. As with most early reading skills, differentiated support is provided for the scope and sequence to meet the needs of all students.

## BLENDING

This is the main strategy for teaching students how to sound out words and must be frequently modeled and applied (Resnick and Beck, 1976; Haddock, 1978; Rosenshine and Stevens, 1984). It is simply the stringing together of letter sounds to read a word. It is the focus of early phonics instruction, but still plays a role when transitioning students from reading one-syllable words to multisyllabic words.

Two types of blending exist-

## final and successive

-and each plays an important role in phonics instruction.


From Phonics to Reading Level A, Student's Edition

## DICTATION

## Dictation

## Think and Write

Directions: Listen to each picture name.
Write the spelling for each sound in a separate box.

2.

3.


From Phonics to Reading Level A, Student's Edition

To best transfer students' growing phonics skills to writing, dictation (which is guided spelling with teacher think-alouds) is critical and begins in Kindergarten.

While not a spelling test, this activity can accelerate students'spelling abilities and understanding of common English spelling patterns and can assist them in using these phonics skills in writing.

Used in combination with word building and structured and unstructured writing experiences in phonics instruction, students have increased opportunities to "try out" their developing skills to express ideas in written form.

## WORD AWARENESS



From Phonics to Reading Level A, Student's Edition

While the introduction to phonics skills is best when explicit and systematic, students also need opportunities to play with words and experiment with how words parts combine in order to solidify and consolidate their understanding of how English words work. Word sorts and word building are key activities to increase students' word awareness (Bear, Templeton, Invernizzi, and Johnston, 2016; Beck and Beck, 2013).

In word building, students are given a set of letter cards and are asked to create a series of words in a specific sequence. This increases their ability to work with letter-sounds flexibly and to fully analyze words for their component sounds and spellings. In word sorts, students look for common spelling patterns, engage in discussions about what they learn about words from this examination, and increase their ability to notice larger chunks in words (an important skill as they transition from one-syllabic to multisyllabic words).

## HIGH-FREQUENCY WORDS

High-frequency words are the most common words in English. Some are irregular; that is, they do not follow common English sound-spellings. Others are regular and are needed by students during reading before they have the phonics skills to sound them out (Johns, 1980; Adams, 1990; Carroll, Davies, and Richman, 1971; Fry, Kress, and Fountoukidis, 1993; Rinsland, 1945).

The top 250-plus words are taught in Grades K-2. Past Grade 2, when the majority of the key high-frequency words have been introduced, students need to be continually assessed on their mastery of these words, as a lack of fluency can impede comprehension. Some words are more difficult to master (e.g., reversals like no/on and was/saw, of/for/from, and words that begin with wh- or th-). These words receive more instructional time and assessment in the From Phonics to Reading program.


From Phonics to Reading Level A, Student's Edition

## READING CONNECTED TEXT



From Phonics to Reading Level A, Student's Edition

The goal of phonics instruction is to develop students' ability to read connected text independently (Adams, 1990). Controlled, decodable text (also known as accountable text) at the beginning level of reading instruction helps students develop a sense of comfort in and control over their reading growth and should be a key learning tool in early phonics instruction.

The tight connection between what students learn in phonics and what they read is essential for building a faster foundation in early reading (Juel and RoperSchneider, 1985; Blevins, 2017). This is especially critical when students encounter less-controlled leveled readers during small group lessons. These accountable (phonics-based) texts need to be reread to build fluency, discussed to develop comprehension, and written about to provide opportunities for students to apply their growing phonics skills in writing.

The accountable texts in the From Phonics to Reading program were written to be instructive, engaging, and comprehensible—using standard English language sentence patterns and high-utility words to benefit early readers.

## PLUS <br> You, THE TEACHER

TEACHER TABLE
ENGLISH LEARNERS
Sound Transfer In Cantonese and Mandarin, there is an approximate transfer for short $u$. There is no transfer in Spanish, Hmong, Korean, or Farsi. Focus on articulation. Model correct mouth position. Have children use hand mirrors to focus on mouth position as they pronounce the sound.

Vocabulary Each day, select several words from the Blend It lines on Student Book, page 51. Focus on words whose meanings can be explained or demonstrated in a concrete way. For example, show a picture of a cup, pup, hut, or jug. Demonstrate the meaning of hum, hug, and cut.

Note: Children will complete the Daily Practice activities on Student Book, page 51 throughout the week. Whenever you see $D$ children will return to previous pages to reinforce their learning.

The power and impact of phonics instruction rests on the shoulders of a skilled, informed teacher. For example, a teacher with expertise in linguistics and research-based phonics routines improves the language of instruction in order to avoid student confusion and better assesses students' instructional needs (Moats, 1995).

Differentiated support is often needed for teachers based on their teaching experience or when they move across grade-level bands ( $\mathrm{K}-2,3-5,6-8$ ) as each band requires a nuanced understanding of phonics and word study instruction. Point-of-use professional development resources are provided in From Phonics to Reading.

From Phonics to Reading Level A, Teacher's Edition

## CONCLUSION

Ensuring these seven (plus one) characteristics are in place is a critical first step in developing a phonics instructional strand that will meet the needs of early readers. The From Phonics to Reading program contains these characteristics through instruction that is active, engaging, and thought-provoking-the kind of instruction that creates active word learners on the path to becoming successful independent readers who love reading.

## REFERENCES

Adams, M. J. (1990). Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Anderson, R. C., Hiebert, E. H., Scott, J. A., \& Wilkinson, I. A. G. (1985). Becoming a nation of readers: The report of the Commission on Reading. Champaign, IL: Center for the Study of Reading and National Academy of Education.

Bear, D. R., Templeton, S., Invernizzi, M., \& Johnston, F. (2016). Words their way: Word study for phonics, vocabulary, and spelling instruction (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
Bear, D. R., Templeton, S., Invernizzi, M., \& Johnston, F. (1996). Words their way: Word study for phonics, vocabulary, and spelling instruction. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill/Prentice-Hall.
Beck, I., \& Beck, M. E. (2013). Making sense of phonics: The hows and whys (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
Beck, I., \& Juel, C. (1995, Summer). The role of decoding in learning to read. American Education, 19(2).
Blevins, W. (2017). A fresh look at phonics: Common causes of failure and 7 ingredients for success. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
Blevins, W. (2011a). Teaching the alphabet: A flexible, systematic approach to building early phonics skills. New York, NY: Scholastic.
Blevins, W. (2011b). Teaching phonics: A flexible, systematic approach to building early reading skills. New York, NY: Scholastic.
Blevins, W. (2011c). Week-by-week phonics and word study activities for the intermediate grades. New York, NY: Scholastic.
Blevins, W. (2006). Phonics from A to Z: A practical guide. New York, NY: Scholastic.
Blevins, W. (2001). Teaching phonics and word study in the intermediate grades. New York, NY: Scholastic.
Carroll, J. B., Davies, P., \& Richman, B. (1971). Word frequency book. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
Chall, J. S. (1996). Stages of reading development (2nd ed.). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt.
Chall, J. S. (1967). Learning to read: The great debate. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
Fry, E. B., Kress, E., \& Fountoukidis, D. L. (1993). The new reading teacher's book of lists. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
Haddock, M. (1978). Teaching blending in beginning reading instruction is important. The Reading Teacher, 31, 654-658.

Hanna, P. R., Hodges, R. E., Hanna, J. L., \& Rudolph, E. H. (1966). Phoneme-grapheme correspondences as cues to spelling improvement. Washington, DC: U.S. Office of Education.
Hattie, J. (2012). Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning. New York, NY: Routledge.
Johns, J. L. (1980). First graders' concepts about print. Reading Research Quarterly, 15, 529-549.
Juel, C., \& Roper-Schneider, D. (1985). The influence of basal readers on first-grade reading. Reading Research Quarterly, 20(2), 134-152.
Moats, L. C. (1995). Spelling: Development, disability, and instruction. Timonium, MD: York Press.
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Resnick, L., \& Beck, I. (1976). Designing instruction in reading: Initial reading. In A. J. Harris \& E. R. Sipay (Eds.), Readings on reading instruction. New York, NY: Longman.
Reutzel, D. R. (2015). Early literacy research: Findings primary-grade teachers will want to know. The Reading Teacher, 69(1), 14-24. doi:10.1002/trtr. 1387
Rinsland, H. D. (1945). A basic vocabulary of elementary school children. New York, NY: Macmillan.
Rosenshine, B., \& Stevens, R. (1984). Classroom instruction in reading. In P. D. Pearson, R. Barr. M. L. Kamil, \& P. Mosenthal (Eds.), Handbook of reading (pp. 745-798). New York, NY: Longman.
Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., \& Griffin, E. (Eds.). (1998). Preventing reading difficulties in young children. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
Stanovich, K. E. (1992). Speculations on the causes and consequences of individual differences in early reading acquisition. In P. B. Gough, L. C. Ehri, \& R. Treiman (Eds.), Reading acquisition (pp. 307-342). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
Wong, M. (2015, May 29). Brain wave study shows how different teaching methods affect reading development. Medical Xpress. Retrieved from medicalxpress. com/news/2015-05-brain-methods-affect.html

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Wiley Blevins is the author of Sadlier's new From Phonics to
Reading for Grades K-3.

This program is a comprehensive foundational skills program that incorporates Seven Key Characteristics of Strong Phonics Instruction.

Embedded professional development along with a critical review and repetition cycle make early reading mastery possible for every student.

Wiley Blevins
wbny@aol.com

Wiley Blevins has taught elementary school in both the United States and South America. A graduate of Harvard Graduate School of Education, he has written over 15 books for teachers (including Phonics from A to Z, A Fresh Look at Phonics, Building Fluency, and Teaching Nonfiction), authored elementary reading programs, conducted research on topics ranging from fluency to using decodable text, and regularly trains teachers throughout the United States and Asia.

His current interests include using adaptive technology and working with districts to correct instructional and material deficits. Wiley lives in New York City and also writes children's books.

## 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 to see more programs that are aligned with the Science of Reading to use together or as stand-alone supplements.

## Sadlier School <br> PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES

A Publication of

