

When children can't read because they lack the necessary phonemic awareness and phonics skills, systematic and explicit instruction in both has been proven to have significant benefit. Recent research has shown that students who enter school with strong phonemic awareness do well in reading while those who enter with poor phonemic awareness struggle. Phonemic awareness, the ability to hear and work with the sounds of spoken language, is the foundation upon which phonics skills

While an average student requires about 20 hours of phonemic instruction to be successful, a struggling student may require two or three times that amount. We have found the time to be well spent, however. Once students master phonemic awareness they "take off," and quickly learn and utilize phonics skills to begin reading. There are many good assessments for the purpose of determining a student's proficiency with phonics skills. Two that we have used include

# *Phonics and Phonemic Awareness:* Tools for Reading Success

are built. It must be sufficiently developed before phonics instruction will be effective. Phonics instruction teaches the relationship between written and spoken language, and helps readers recognize words accurately and automatically. Students must be able to recognize words automatically to be fluent readers. The good news is that both phonemic awareness and phonics can be taught. When working with struggling readers it is important to assess in the areas of phonemic awareness and phonics and to provide remediation where needed. Although many reading programs provide a subtest for assessing phonemic awareness, we have found an informal teacher made test to be a good measure of proficiency. When choosing an evaluation instrument it is important to use one that measures a student's ability to hear and manipulate sounds in the following areas:

**Listening for and isolating beginning and ending sounds in words**

**Substitution of sounds in a word to make new words: (replace the /p/ in "pat" with /c/ to make "cat")**

**Blending: Hearing /p/-/i/-/g/ and saying "pig"**

**Unlocking: Hearing "cat" and saying /c/-/a/-/t/**

**Rhyming**

**Omission of beginning sound: "Say mat without the /m/."**

A deficiency in any area indicates a need for instruction and practice in that skill. A remedial program might include the following components:

**An evaluation by an audiologist.**

**Use of computer software such as Earobics for auditory training.**

**Use of Interactive Read Alouds for the purpose of modeling how individual sounds fit together to make words.**

**Systematic instruction in hearing and manipulating sounds in one on one or small group settings.**



the Names Test by Patricia Cunningham and a teacher made Onsets and Rhymes assessment. The specific sounds students need to be assessed in are:

**Consonants**

**Short vowels**

**Consonant digraphs (sh, ch, th, wh, ph)**

**Consonant blends**

**Long vowels with silent e**

**Vowel teams**

**Vowel diphthongs (ou, ow, oy, oi)**

**Silent consonants**

**Inflectional endings (s, ed, ing)**

**Prefixes**

**Suffixes**



Remediation is provided with any sounds the child has difficulty with. The most effective phonics instruction utilizes these methods:

- Direct instruction techniques that include group and individual responses
- Use of key words and picture cues to facilitate memorization
- Color coding on flashcards and charts to highlight the sound being taught
- Shared Reading (linking the phonics lessons to the shared reading selections makes them more effective)
- Interactive writing of class composed phonic charts
- Word walls
- Both guided and independent practice
- Activities and games
- Modeling of how to apply phonics skills in reading and spelling
- Short intensive instruction (10 minutes or less)
- A multisensory approach including visual, auditory, and motor modalities
- Frequent review of previously taught sounds
- Abundant repetition
- Opportunities for connection of phonetic instruction to meaningful text
- Frequent assessing of concepts taught

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- Sorting activities
- Use of songs and poems to promote phonetic sounds
- Dictation
- Books that contain previously taught phonic elements for reading and rereading
- Systematic teaching of the 37 most common rhymes

By using the 37 most common rhymes (the part of the word with the vowel) and substituting the different onsets (the part before the rhyme), students can easily form 500 words. The ability to instantly recognize the most common rhymes should be mastered by all students. The most common rhymes are:

**-ack -all -ain -ake -ale -ame -an  
-ank -ap -ash -at -ate -aw -ay  
-eat -ell -est -ice -ick -ide -ight  
-ill -in -ine -ing -ink -ip -ir  
-ock -oke -op -ore -or -uck -ug  
-ump -unk**

There are many excellent resources available to aid teachers in the teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics skills. One favorite book that we have used is called *Phonics A to Z* by Wiley Blevins. It is published by Scholastic. We have also listed below some favorite websites containing many ideas for lessons and activities. It is important to remember that the purpose of phonics instruction is to enable our students to recognize words quickly and automatically. The teaching of “sounding out” is a means to an end. Most students can master most phonetic elements within two years. As soon as our students develop automatic word recognition skills we need to direct our instructional focus to comprehension through increased reading and writing of text. We should, however, continue to teach the application of phonics skills in the attack of new words in guided reading groups. ■

**Editors’ note:** How does your district/school reading program align with research-based, Reading First strategies and mandates? This article is the third installment in an ongoing series on best practices for teaching reading. All issues of *The Utah Special Educator* will address each of the five essential reading components, one per issue, and highlight schools, programs and teachers that successfully apply these best practice criteria. A compilation of current and future articles in this reading series can be found at:

**[www.updc.org/specialeducator/index.html](http://www.updc.org/specialeducator/index.html)**

