



A FOURTEEN-POINT CHECKLIST FOR A SUCCESSFUL PHONICS READING PROGRAM

1. ONE LETTER AT A TIME

Short-vowel sounds are the very foundation of our English language. They can be difficult to learn and are best taught first of all, one at a time, in isolation. Teaching only one sound per letter at first promotes accuracy and prevents guessing.
(Beneficial for everyone – especially ELL, LD, and hearing-challenged students.)

2. ILLUSTRATED LETTERS

Every letter should be illustrated with pictures of objects *beginning* with the sound. Multiple illustrations enhance learning by adding a depth of perspective that is similar in effect to a 3-D hologram, and depicts the subtle variations in each sound. There is evidence that at first many children cannot hear these sounds *within* a word.
(Multiple pictures beginning with each sound also strengthens phonemic awareness.)

3. LARGE LETTERS

Even with proper glasses students often struggle with smaller letters when first learning how to read. It's easier for everyone to learn from larger letters. This feature is especially useful to beginners, LD learners, or those with vision challenges.
(Once reading is well-established, it's much easier to read finer print.)

4. PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Phonemic awareness is a *precursor* to phonics but should not be confused *with* phonics. Teach phonemic awareness with letters at the same time for maximum efficiency. *“Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when it is kept simple and when it includes letters.”* ~Timothy Shanahan, Director, UIC Center for Literacy
(Phonemic awareness teaches only sounds. Phonics teaches both letters and sounds.)

5. MULTISENSORY

A multisensory approach ensures success for everyone, regardless of their learning mode. *How* students learn may be different – but *what* they learn should be the same. *Everyone* should be able to decode long words by syllables, whatever their learning mode. A multisensory method has the synergistic effect of addressing the strongest mode while reinforcing the weakest.
(After all, visual learners still must hear the word, and auditory learners still must see the word.)

6. BLEND CONSONANTS & VOWELS

When teaching consonants, blending them with a vowel sound rather than teaching them in isolation eliminates the extra “uh” sound heard in voiced consonants (such as “d-uh”). This strategy develops smooth eye-tracking skills and prevents choppy reading. Students read “di-g” not “duh-i-g,” and “ca-t” not “cuh-a-t,” etc.
(Reading two-letter syllables before reading whole words also prevents or corrects reversals.)

7. BUILD WORDS ASAP

Building words immediately as letters are learned provides concrete exemplars for what can otherwise be confusing and abstract rules and sounds. It prevents the “reading-without-understanding” syndrome sometimes seen when phonograms are all learned first.
(Memory experts know it is easier to remember something new if you connect it to something known.)

8. BLEND-AND-BUILD

Blend two-letter syllables into words, build words into two-word phrases, then build phrases into complete sentences of gradually increasing complexity. It's too big a jump for students to move directly from single words to complete sentences. Progressive blending practice strengthens eye tracking skills, increases eye span, and prevents reversals. It jump-starts reading for everyone, *especially* for dyslexics!
(Just because we've learned the piano notes does not mean we're ready to play a sonata.)

9. COMBINE SPELLING & READING

Reading and spelling enhance one another and are best taught as an integrated unit. Learning how to read and spell by systematic, incremental patterns develops clear, analytical thinking which spills over into other disciplines. Spelling today is taken from the stories being read – meaning it's taught randomly. What if we had to learn math randomly: 12×7 , 6×9 , 8×4 , 5×11 , etc?
(When we learn how to read and spell by pattern math scores frequently improve without tutoring.)

10. ONE SPELLING AT A TIME

Initially teach only one spelling of a phoneme at a time until reading is well-established. It's more difficult to teach and learn all the spellings of a phoneme at once. After one spelling rule is learned, others can be gradually introduced, one at a time.
(Don't you remember names better meeting people one at a time?)

11. 100% DECODABLE READING

Early practice readings should *only* be comprised of sounds and rules already learned. The left brain acquires knowledge by small, sequential parts (letter sounds, math). The right brain acquires knowledge by seeing the whole picture (sight words, illustrations).
(Activity in one hemisphere suppresses the activity of mirror-image region on the other side.)

12. ADD SIGHT WORDS GRADUALLY

After the mechanics of reading are established, sight words can be gradually introduced, a few at a time, such as "I" and "a." Example: "I had a fat cat." Limited reading skills should be reasonably fluent before sight words are introduced.
(Human attention is limited. It cannot be directed to identities of letters at the same time we are trying to comprehend the meaning of what we are reading.)

13. TEACH SIGHT WORDS BY PATTERN

Words learned in patterns are grouped and filed in one "folder" and quickly retrieved. Words learned randomly are filed in separate folders and take more time to retrieve. Example: sight words "could, would, should" are best taught with other /ō/ words such as "took, book, cookie" and "put, push, pudding," etc.
(Learning how to read randomly results in slow and laborious reading. Children seldom read for pleasure.)

14. INCLUDE ALL SPELLING RULES

Linguistic awareness eases learning, and develops logical, analytical thinking. Example: "Why are some words spelled -able and others -ible, as in appeasable, horrible, etc.?" It's much easier knowing one rule for many words than it is learning each word individually!
(Critical thinking sharpens, and spelling improves dramatically.)

(References available at *The Comprehension Dilemma*, www.dorbooks.com/downloads.html)