



A FOURTEEN-POINT CHECKLIST FOR AN OUTSTANDING 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. Focusing on only one sound at a time develops reading accuracy and prevents guessing.
(Beneficial for everyone ~ especially ELL, LD, or hearing-challenged students.)

2. ILLUSTRATED LETTERS

Every letter should be illustrated with pictures of objects *beginning* with the sound. At first many children are unable to hear these sounds *within* a word. 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 of each sound.
(Multiple pictures beginning with each sound develops and 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 initially. This feature is especially useful to beginners, LD learners, or those with vision challenges.
(Once reading is well-established, it is 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. TEACH CONSONANTS WITH VOWELS

When teaching consonants, blending them with a vowel rather than teaching them in isolation eliminates the extra "uh" sound heard in voiced consonants (such as "d-uh"). This strategy begins to develop 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 will remediate and help prevent reversals.)

7. BUILD WORDS ASAP

Building words 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. BUILD SENTENCES GRADUALLY

Blend letters into words, combine words into two-word phrases, and then build short phrases into longer phrases and sentences of gradually increasing complexity. It's too big a leap for many students to move directly from single words to complete sentences. Graduated reading practice jump-starts reading for everyone, *especially* for dyslexics. (*Just because we've learned all 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, such as math.

Spelling today is taken from the stories being read ~meaning it's taught randomly. What if we had to learn math randomly: 12x7, 6x9, 8x4, 5x11, 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 multiple spellings of a phoneme all 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 PRACTICE

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 activity of the mirror-image area on the other side. (*Once decoding is automatic we are able to see the whole word at once~the gestalt!*)

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. (*Attention can only be focused on one thing at a time. It cannot be directed to identifying letters at the same time that 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 /oo/ words such as "took, book, cookie" and "put, push, pudding," etc. (*Learning words randomly results in slow, laborious reading, and 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.*)