

Handout: Alphabetics Terminology

Phoneme

The smallest individual sound in an oral language.

Phonemic Awareness

The ability to hear and manipulate the individual sounds in oral language. When students are reading at the lowest levels and are having difficulty decoding words, it is often because they have problems with phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness doesn't develop naturally – it has to be taught. When we learn English as children, we learn it orally and focus on the complete word. Students will need explicit instruction and practice in discerning and manipulating individual sounds in words.

Grapheme

The letter or letters that represent a sound when it is written.

Phonics

The relationship between the sounds of oral language and written symbols, and how those symbols are used to create recognizable words in print. In other words, phonics is the relationship between phonemes and graphemes. Understanding this relationship allows good readers to accurately decode unfamiliar words.

Phonological Awareness

The ability to identify and manipulate different components of oral language. Phonemic awareness is a subset of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness includes

- phonemic awareness;
- recognizing individual words in a sentence;
- identifying syllables within a word;
- recognizing rhyming words;
- Identifying onsets (initial consonants) and rimes (the vowel and whatever else follows an onset) in syllables.

Decoding

Using skills and strategies to identify words in print. In other words, converting the printed code into oral language.

Voiced

The vocal cords vibrate when the sound is made, as in the sound /v/.

Unvoiced

The vocal cords do not vibrate when the sound is made, as in the sound /f/.

Continuant

The sound can be continued as long as you have breath. All vowels and some consonants, such as /v/ and /f/, are continuants.

Stopped

The sound cannot be continued. Some consonant sounds are stopped, such as /d/.

Nasal

The sound comes through the nose. There are three nasal sounds: /m/, /n/, and /ng/ as in *ring*. If you make these sounds and then pinch your nose, the sound will stop.

Consonant Blend

Two or more consonants blend together but each letter sound can still be heard. Examples include /bl/, /br/, /cl/, /cr/, /dr/, /fr/, /tr/, /fl/, /gl/, /gr/, /pl/, /pr/, /sl/, /sm/, /sp/, and /st/. Blends can occur at the beginning of words, like *blue* or *crook*. They can also occur at the end of words, like *last* or *rasp*.

Consonant Digraphs

Two consonants join together to create a new sound. Examples include /ch/, /ph/, /sh/, /th/, /wh/, and /ck/. Digraphs can occur at the beginning of words, like *chew* or *shook*. They can also occur at the end of words, like *bath* or *truck*.

Consonant Trigraphs

When three consonants join together to create a new sound. Examples include /sch/, /shr/, /sph/, /squ/, /thr/, and /tch/. Trigraphs can occur at the beginning of words, like schedule or sphere. They can also occur at the end of words, like batch.

Handout: Phonemic Awareness

There are eight phonemic awareness skills. In the examples below, we use *b* to refer to the letter *b* and we use /b/ to refer to the sound it makes.

Phonemic Awareness Skills

Phoneme Isolation

The ability to recognize individual sounds in a word.

Example

Tutor: what is the first sound in *dog*? Student: /d/

Tutor: What is the last sound in *dog*? Student: /g/

Phoneme Identity

The ability to recognize the same sound in different words.

Example

Tutor: What is the same sound in *boy*, *bike*, and *bell*? Student: /b/

Phoneme Categorization

The ability to group like sounds together and recognize when one sound is different.

Example

Tutor: Which word doesn't belong based on the initial sound: *bus*, *bun*, *rug*? Student: *rug*. It begins with /r/ and not with /b/.

Phoneme Blending

The ability to hear individual sounds, then combine them to form a recognizable word.

Example

Tutor: What word is formed when I blend these sounds together: /b/ /a/ /l/? Student: *ball*.

Phoneme Segmentation

The ability to recognize separate sounds within a word.

Example

Tutor: How many sounds are in *ship*? Student: 3. Tutor: What are they? Student: /sh/ /i/ /p/.

Phoneme Deletion

The ability to remove a sound from a word and recognize what is left.

Example

Tutor: What is *smile* without the /s/? Student: *mile*.

Phoneme Addition

The ability to make a new word by adding a sound to an existing word.

Example

Tutor: What word do you have if you add /s/ to the beginning of *park*? Student: *spark*.

Phoneme Substitution

The ability to substitute one sound for another to form a new word.

Example

Tutor: In the word *bat*, change /a/ to /e/. What is the new word? Student: *bet*

Guidelines

Below are guidelines to use as you design phonemic awareness practices for students.

- Practice these skills using oral exercises with students for approximately 10 minutes each lesson.
- These skills can be practiced any time after reading the text.
- The words you use for phonemic awareness practice can come from the reading but do not have to. They should be one or two syllable words and should be part of the student's oral vocabulary.
- Begin with phonemic isolation, identity, and categorization. These are the easiest skills to learn. Once students have mastered these, move on to the other skills.
- Focus on one or two tasks at a time.
- Practice recognizing phonemes in the beginning, middle, and end of words.
- Segmenting and blending may be most useful to students.
- Use explicit instruction and a systematic approach to teach phonemic awareness.

Handout: Teaching Phonics

Phonics instruction helps students make the connection between the sounds of English and the letters that represent the sounds. This skill is necessary for students to be able to decode the words on a page. Below are the basic steps for teaching a phonics element or principle.

Steps for Teaching Phonics

1. Identify the letter for the phonics lesson and write the small letter. Begin by teaching students to recognize the small letter because the majority of letters they see will be in lower case. Students repeat the name of the letter.
2. Selects words from the lesson that begin with the letter and sound. The number of words you pick should be enough to provide students with several examples but not overwhelm them. Start with 3–5 words, then adjust accordingly. Explain that these words begin with the sound the letter makes and model the sound. Say the words and have students listen for the sound. Write the words on the board and read them again.
3. Ask students to read the words. Do this 2–3 times. Always ask students to “read” words, not “say” words to reinforce the fact that they are reading.
4. Ask students to pick a key word. Explain that they will use that word to model and produce the sound of the letter. Ask students to model the sound of the letter.
5. Ask students for examples of other words that begin with this sound. Write these words on the board. Ask students to read these words.
6. Give students examples of words that end with the sound and letter. Write these words on the board and read them. Ask students to read the words. Ask students for examples of other words that end in the sound. Write these on the board and ask students to read them.
7. Give students examples of words that have the sound and letter in the middle. Write these words on the board and read them. Ask students to read the words. Ask students for examples of other words that have the sound in the middle of the word. Write these on the board and ask students to read them.
8. Review the name, sound, and key word for the phonics element.
9. Students write the letter, key word, and other words they want to learn.
10. Write and explain the capital letter.

Suggestions

- Keywords to use as examples of phonics elements and principles can come from anywhere: a published story, a picture, student generated materials, real world materials, and a student's own vocabulary.
- When teaching consonants, be sure not to confuse individual sounds with blends (/br/ /tr/) and digraphs (/sh/ /th/).
- When teaching vowel sounds, you may find it necessary to focus more on recognizing the letter and sound in the middle of the word. Use short, single syllable words as examples.
- Another approach you may see is to teach multiple phonics elements per lesson, but to focus on learning one example for each element (this is the approach in *Laubach Way to Reading*). Either method is appropriate. The one used above helps students recognize more words in print more quickly, while teaching multiple phonics elements helps students recognize more phonics elements in print more quickly.

Sequence of Phonics Instruction

In phonics instruction, there is a customary sequence for introducing different elements and principles. It begins with the easier elements and progresses to more difficult elements and principles. Of course, you can adjust this sequence to accommodate students' specific needs or questions.

- Single consonant sounds
- Short vowels
- Long vowels
- Consonant blends and digraphs
- Other common vowel teams
- Additional phonics elements and principles

Adapted from Tutor 8: A Collaborative, Learner-Centered Approach to Literacy Instruction for Teens and Adults and Teaching Adults: A Literacy Resource Handbook

Handout: Fluency Terminology

Components of Fluency

Speed

In measures of fluency, speed is the number of words a person is able to read. It is usually measured in Words Per Minute (WPM). It is assessed by asking someone to read a passage, then dividing the number of words read correctly by the number of minutes it took to read the passage. The goal of speed-focused fluency practice is to move the student toward automaticity.

Automaticity

Automaticity, as it relates to fluency, is the ability to recognize words automatically without thinking. When the reader can recognize words automatically, without focusing on details of the word, more mental energy is left for understanding meaning.

Accuracy

In fluency, reading with accuracy simply means reading the words in a passage correctly.. Reading quickly but without accuracy is not fluent reading. It will not help comprehension.

Prosody

Prosody in reading includes all the variables one would use to describe expressive speech: timing, phrasing, emphasis, and intonation. These characteristics add meaning, but are absent on the printed page. To gain meaning, readers must add these variables as they interact with text.

Reading Levels

As you identify teaching techniques you can use to help students develop fluency, you may see the terms *independent reading level* or *instructional reading level*. This is what those terms mean.

Independent Reading Level

This means a student can read a passage alone with ease, without making errors, and with good comprehension. Typically, the student would be able to quickly and accurately decode 95% or more of the words, and understand almost all of the text.

Instructional Reading Level

This means the passage will be challenging for a student to read, but not frustrating. The challenge allows the student to stretch and develop decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills. Typically, a student would be able to quickly and accurately decode 90-95% of the words, and understand approximately 80% of the text.

Frustration Reading Level

With reading material at this level, the student has real difficulty. As a result, he or she becomes frustrated rather than challenged. Typically this characterizes any passage where the student is able to accurately decode less than 90% of the words and understands less than 80% of the text.

Handout: Fluency Assessment

Informal Assessment

1. Select a short passage that is at the student's independent reading level. The passage should take 1–2 minutes for the student to read.
2. Make two copies (one for you and one for the student).
3. Time the student during the reading.
4. When the student has finished reading, stop and record the time, in seconds.
5. Count the number of words in the passage. Subtract the number of words that the student missed or didn't decode.
6. Use this formula to calculate the fluency rate in words per minute (WPM):

$$\text{WPM} = \frac{(\text{number of words in passage} - \text{number of words missed}) \times 60}{\text{number of seconds to read the passage}}$$

7. Repeat the process 2–3 times.
8. Date the passage and record the reading level of the passage and the fluency rates.

Fluency Rates

Reading/Grade Level	Silent Reading Rate	Oral Reading Rate
1 st grade	80 wpm	53 wpm
2 nd grade	115 wpm	89 wpm
3 rd grade	138 wpm	107 wpm
4 th grade	158 wpm	123 wpm
5 th grade	173 wpm	139 wpm
6 th grade	185 wpm	150 wpm
7 th grade	195 wpm	150 wpm
8 th grade	204 wpm	151 wpm
9 th grade	214 wpm	
10 th grade	224 wpm	
11 th grade	237 wpm	
12 th grade	250 wpm	
College or university	280 wpm	

Subway Conductor (513 words, 7.2 grade level)

In the late 1970s, the New York City Transit Authority opened the titles of motorman and conductor to female applicants. By the time I became a conductor in 1982, there were still very few women working in these titles. We remained oddities, pioneers.

Most of the people on the subway trains don't really have much of an idea what the motorman or the conductor does. The motorman works in the front of the train and drives it. The conductor works at or near the middle of the train, operates the doors and makes most of the announcements.

A lot of people think the subway conductor and motorman job must be easy or even fun to do. That wasn't my experience. The high noise level and the vibration are nerve-wracking. It's against the rules to use earplugs, though that never stopped me from protecting my hearing that way. The air is full of steel dust which gets in your eyes and your nose and gives your uniform a silvery sheen that the old-timers call "silver dust." The trains are often brutally cold in the winter and hot as hell in the summer. The work is fairly dangerous: each employee averages one lost time accident a year and about one motorman or conductor out of a total of six thousand dies in a work accident each year.

By the time you get off your train after a trip of around two hours, you are ready for a break. But usually you get less than ten minutes in the crew room. At lunch, you might, if lucky, get thirty minutes. Even then, the crew room is pretty grim, dirty, and noisy. Not exactly climate-controlled either. The ones underground are the worst. The toilet facilities are unreliable, often smelly and sometimes flooded, and you can practically never get soap or towels. To make matters worse, most terminals do not have separate facilities for men and women, but more of that later.

All too quickly you are back "on the road." For a conductor, this is time to play "duck the rider." When I was working the Number 4 line, I was the target of an average of two attempted physical assaults a week. When I tell people this, they usually assume I must have done something to provoke my assailants—they just can't imagine that human beings would attack someone completely innocent. Well, guess again. The assaults were mostly from children! The conductor has to observe the train for three car lengths as it pulls out of each station. That means we have to have our heads out the window of the cab as the train pulls out, until it moves 150 feet. The kids know this. They wait there on the platform getting ready to spit, hit or throw something as the conductor passes. They get a kick out of hitting someone who can't do anything back. Some of these kids look as young as seven or eight. Usually the injury is more psychological than physical, but not always.

*Excerpt from Subway Conductor, by Marian Swerdlow
published by New Readers Press, Voyager 8, 1998*

A Way With Words (443 words, 9.2 grade level)

Sharing the Concern

I presented information about worldwide illiteracy to my church, convincing its board to allocate money to this practical, educational mission through the National Council of Churches. I quoted the Chinese saying:

*If you are planning for a year, plant rice.
If you are planning for a decade, plant trees.
If you are planning for a lifetime, educate a person.*

But illiteracy in America? I'd never even considered it a problem. After all, our tax money provided schools for every child from age 5 through 16.

It took a 1961 Syracuse newspaper article giving the 1960 U.S. Census figures to bring the problem to my own world. I was astonished to learn that 11,055 functional illiterates lived—not in India or Africa—but in my own city, Syracuse, New York, and my own county.

Back in 1961, when I read that newspaper article, I was shocked. "Why doesn't somebody do something?" I wondered. And an inner voice would not let this question escape my mind. I was somebody.

"But I have my own family responsibilities," I reasoned. We'd just completed the exhausting process of visiting colleges and universities, helping our son, Terry, choose a campus to his liking. Lindy, our high school-aged daughter, kept me busy trying to keep up with her full social and scholastic schedule. My husband, Bob, area sales representative for Oakite Products, depended on me for his secretarial help. I was also busy with church, Scouts, and other civic responsibilities.

But perhaps I could take just a few hours to find out what was being done to alleviate the problem. Besides, maybe those newspaper figures had been misinterpreted.

Statistics Confirmed

No, the article hadn't been wrong, as I'd hoped. I made a few inquiries into the availability of adult education classes and talked with directors of social service agencies. Yes, they were well aware of the problem, but little or nothing was being done to help.

So I collected information and even prepared a slide presentation showing local needs and mentioning statistics on illiteracy. Then I invited community leaders to a coffee at my home. They were as shocked as I had been. Yes, they said, adult reading problems deserved their attention. But how could they help?

Many questions on how to tackle this project went unanswered until Myra Eadie, then president of Syracuse's Church Women United (CWU), suggested I make a presentation on the problems of illiteracy to representatives of the churchwomen's groups in the area. I did, and they all responded to my plea to sponsor the project—but only if I would head up the work.

Excerpt from A Way With Words, by Ruth Colvin, published by New Readers Press, 2005