

Phonics

Phonics is the understanding that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes (the sounds of spoken language) and graphemes (the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language). Readers use these relationships to recognize familiar words and to decode unfamiliar ones. When children learn these relationships well, most of the words in their spoken language become accessible when they see them in print.

Phonics instruction is a way of teaching reading that stresses learning how letters correspond to sounds and how to use this knowledge in reading and spelling. The goal is to help children understand that there is a systematic and predictable relationship between written letters and spoken sounds. Some reading programs are labeled “phonics” programs. For ELLs, such programs may result in an ability to pronounce words; however, comprehension is facilitated by the use of background knowledge, along with syntactic and semantic cues, to make sense of the text. The problem is that students may not be able to comprehend what they read. Therefore, when reading is seen as a process of constructing meaning, readers use their background knowledge, along with syntactic and semantic cues, to make sense of text.

Phonics instruction is particularly beneficial for children at risk for reading difficulties. This might include children who come to school with limited exposure to books, have had few opportunities to develop their oral languages, are from low socio-economic families, have below-average intelligence, are learning English as a second language, or are suspected of having a learning disability.

The purpose of phonics instruction is to help students recognize words independently, not to have them state rules or generalizations. Approximately 84% of English words are phonetically regular. Therefore, teaching the most common sound-spelling relationships in English is extremely useful to readers. ELLs can participate in all phonics activities as long as they understand the meanings of the words that they are asked to hear, say, read, and write. The following principles apply to phonics for English learners:

- Provide ample time for students to read and write for meaningful purposes, allowing students to develop their own understanding of sound/symbol correspondences.
- Informally assess phonics and word recognition skills students already use in writing and reading; then focus on teaching new skills that will promote independence.
- Always teach phonics and other word recognition skills within a meaningful context. Enjoy the story or poem for meaning first; then teach the skill.
- Generally, teach spelling patterns rather than rules.
- Explicit direct instruction is the most effective type of instruction for ELLs.
- Remember that phonics and other word recognition strategies are a means to an end: comprehension.

Considerations when instructing ELLs include the following:

- Students who are not literate in their own language or whose language does not have a written form may not understand some concepts and may need to be taught about the functions of print.
- Students may have learned to read and write in a native language in which the letters correspond to different sounds than they do in English, or they may have learned to read and write in a language with characters that correspond to words or portions of words. Discuss letters that may have different pronunciations or sounds (e.g., the letter <h> in Spanish is silent).
- Oral and written language can develop simultaneously provided that instruction is organized to be meaningful and relevant. The teacher needs to provide systematic instruction in letter-sound correspondence as well as in the area of decoding.
- The environment is a significant factor in the process and mechanics of language development. ELLs learn the specific variety of language (dialect) that the important people around them speak. Teachers can help sustain language development by providing environments full of language development opportunities. Every child's language or dialect is worthy of respect in the classroom, as it reflects the identities, values, and experiences of the child's family and community.
- Teachers should encourage interaction among children. Peer learning is an important part of language development.
- Categorize groups of words that contain the same word pattern. Explicit instruction in new word patterns helps English language learners learn English more efficiently.
- Correct differences in speech sounds carefully. Speech sounds in English may be different from those of the student's first language and do not need to be corrected continuously.
- Speaking and listening are part of the whole learning process and cannot be developed in isolation. Oral language should provide a background and springboard for developing all language skills across the curriculum. Students should have opportunities to express their opinions, ideas and feelings in an environment that respects them.
- The following are useful generalizations about English stress to explicitly teach ELLs:
 - In two-syllable words, one syllable always has more emphasis, or stress. It is usually the first syllable (*sister, blanket, table*).
 - Prefixes and suffixes usually form separate syllables. The stress generally falls either on or within the base word (*unlock, playful, going*).
 - In compound words the primary accent falls on or within the first word (*breakfast*).
 - When the vowel sound in the last syllable is a vowel team, that syllable is usually accented (*below, today*).
- Spanish and Haitian-Creole have unique characteristics. When testing or observing oral reading of students of diverse backgrounds, think about the part language interference may be playing.

Language Interferences of Spanish for English Language Learners

Phonology

1. Spanish does not have short vowel sounds like English.
2. Consonant sound substitutions

English	Spanish Substitution
b (box)	v (vox)
j (jet)	y (yet)
j (jet)	ch (chet)
m (Sam)	ng (sang)
n (run)	ng (rung)
s (sell)	z (zell)
sh (ship)	ch (chip)
th (than)	d (Dan)
th (they)	s (say)
w (wait)	g (gate)

3. Difficulties with final consonant sounds in English may occur because only a limited number of final consonant sounds occur in Spanish. Consonants that cause difficulty include: *b, g, h, k, m, p, s,* and *v*.
4. Difficulties with final consonant digraphs in English may occur. Consonant digraphs that cause difficulty include: voiced *th*, unvoiced *th, sh* and *ch*.
5. Difficulties with certain initial consonant blends in English may occur. These include: *sk, sm, sn, sp, st, scr, shr, spl, spr,* and *str*.

Grammar

1. In Spanish *no* is used to mean both "not" and "no."
English: She did not go.
Spanish: She no go.
2. The words *do, does,* and *did* are not used to form questions in Spanish.
English: Did you go shopping?
Spanish: You go shopping? (raising intonation)
3. *To be* is not used to express temperature, age, or state of being in Spanish.
English: I am 18 years old.
Spanish: I have 18 years.
4. The prepositions *in* and *on* are not used in Spanish. Instead, *en* is used.
English: The pot is on the stove.
Spanish: The pot is en the stove.

5. The comparative and superlative suffixes *er* and *est* are not used in Spanish. Instead, *more* and *the most* are used.

English: John is the biggest.

Spanish: John is the most big.

6. Articles are used with professional titles.

English: I saw Dr. Lynn.

Spanish: I saw the Dr. Lynn.

Language Interferences of Haitian Creole for English Language Learners

Phonology

1. There are no short vowel sounds in Haitian Creole.
2. Consonant sound substitutions

English	Creole Substitution
r (ripe)	w (wipe)
sh (shin)	ch (chin)
th (think)	sh (sink)
th (them)	z (zem)
n (run)	ng (rung)

3. Difficulties with final consonant digraphs in English may occur because only a limited number are used in Haitian- Creole. Difficulty with *b, f, g, h, k, m, p, s,* and *v*.
4. Difficulties with final consonant digraphs in English include: unvoiced *th*, voiced *th*, *sh*, and *ch*.
5. Difficulties with certain initial consonant blends in English include: *sk, sm, sn, sp, st, scr, shr, spl, spr,* and *str*.

Grammar

1. Plurals are not made by adding *s*. Instead *yo* is placed after the noun.
2. There are not variant forms of pronouns (such as *they, them, their, he, she, it*). *He* is used to refer to males, females, and objects.
3. The verb *to be* is not used.
4. Definite articles (*the*) are used after nouns, not before.

Source: Adapted from Crawley, S. & Merritt, K. (2004). *Remediating Reading Difficulties* (4th ed.). New York, NY:McGrawHill Companies, Inc.

Phonics Activities/Strategies

Morphemic Analysis

TIP: Preview text for unfamiliar or difficult affixes. These can be directly pretaught using the procedure explained below.

Purpose:

Morphemic analysis, also referred to as structural analysis, is the process of using one's knowledge of word parts to deduce meanings of unknown words. A morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in a word. There are two types of morphemes: free and bound. A free morpheme is a freestanding root or base of any word that cannot be further divided and still have meaning. In the word farmer, farm is the root word or free morpheme. The -er portion of the word farmer is considered to be a bound morpheme. Bound morphemes carry meaning, but only when attached to a free morpheme. The most common bound morphemes are prefixes (in-, pre-, mono-,) suffixes (-er, -ous, -ology), and inflectional endings (-s, -es, -ing, -ed, -est). There are several ways that teachers commonly introduce morphemic analysis to students as a way of learning the meaning of new words. Sometimes we use students' knowledge of morphemes to analyze the meaning of a new word by showing a list of similar words having the same morpheme. Other times teachers simply tell students the meanings of new morphemes and let them figure out the meaning of new words containing the morpheme on their own or in small groups.

Materials:

The essential activity for teachers is to research the meanings of morphemes and, in the case of activities involving word family lists, examples of other words having the morphemes to be used. A helpful resource in planning vocabulary activities is *The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists* (Fry, Kress, & Fountoukidis, 1993).

Procedure:

Pre-select words to be learned from the reading selection; then do the necessary background research and planning about the morphemes found in the new words. One activity is to construct word family lists that help students determine morpheme meanings. For example, a middle school teacher might decide to focus on the word claustrophobia. Her research into the morpheme -phobia might lead to the construction of the following list:

Claustrophobia
Cardiophobia

Olfactophobia
Telephonophobia

Verbaphobia

This activity causes students to use compare-and-contrast methods of morphemic analysis. That is, they must look at the unfamiliar word and use their prior knowledge of other words that look like parts of the unfamiliar word to figure out what each word probably means. For example, cardio- probably reminds you of cardiac, which deals with the heart and - phobia, which means "fear of." Therefore, cardiophobia must mean a fear of heart disease. To use this compare-and-contrast technique with students, first select words that have morphemes that can be compared to other words students are likely to know; then present both the new word and other words that begin or end like the unfamiliar word. Look at the following example from Cooter and Flynt (1996):

Morphemic analysis continued...

Because of my expansive vocabulary, my teacher called me a verbivore.

verbi-	vore
verbal	varnivore
verbose	herbivore
verbalize	omnivore

The teacher would write the sentence on the chalkboard and list below it examples of words that begin and end like the unfamiliar word. Then, through questioning, the teacher would lead students to specify the word's meaning by comparing and contrasting the known words to the unfamiliar one, thus concluding: A *verbivore* is a person who loves (eats) words.

Another way of using morphemic analysis to help students deduce meaning is to present unfamiliar terms along with explanations of the morphemes that make up the unfamiliar terms. The following procedure might be used as part of an introduction to a new text containing the words listed.

Step 1: Identify the terms that need preteaching.

Pro-life	Pro-choice	Unable
Illegal	Rearrest	Forewarn

Step 2: Along with these terms, write on the board a list of appropriate morphemes and their meanings.

pro = in favor of	fore = earlier	un = not
il = not	re = to do again	

Step 3: Engage students in a discussion of what each term means and how the terms are interrelated. When there is confusion or disagreement, direct students to the terms in the text and/or the glossary for verification.

As useful as morphemic analysis can be, Cooter and Flynt (1996) offered a word of caution concerning morphemic analysis. "Although we encourage the teaching of how to use context and morphemic analysis, we in no way advocate the overuse of these two techniques, nor the memorization of lists of morphemes or types of context clues. Teachers who make students memorize common prefixes and suffixes run the risk of having students view the task as an end and not a means to help them become better readers." The story is told of a student who memorized the prefix "trans-" as meaning "across". Later the same week, the student was reading a science text and was asked what the word "transparent" meant. He replied confidently, "across mother or father." The point is that all vocabulary instruction in the upper grades should be meaning-oriented, connected to text, functional, and capable of being used in the future.

** The above mentioned activity for morphemic analysis is also useful for vocabulary instruction.*

Making Words

TIP: Review letter sounds with ELLs before using letters in activities.

Purpose: To make little words and then bigger words using letters that students know. This activity is intended for use during centers or small group instruction.

Materials: Letters, index cards, envelope

Procedure:

1. Decide upon a “secret word” which can be made with all the letters. Consider the students’ interests, the curriculum tie-ins that can be made, and the letter/sound patterns in which words can be sorted at the end.
2. Make a list of other words that can be made from these letters.
3. From all the words made, pick 12-15 words using these criteria:
 - Words that can be sorted for the pattern to be emphasized
 - Little words and big words so that the lesson is a multilevel lesson
 - “Abracadabra” words that can be made with the same letters in different places (sides/dies) which remind students that when words are spelled, the order of the letters is crucial
 - A proper name or two to remind students to use capital letters
 - Words that most students have in their listening vocabularies
4. Write all the words on index cards and order them from shortest to longest.
5. Once you have the two-letter, three-letter, etc., words together, order them so you can emphasize letter patterns and show how changing the position of the letters, changing one letter, or adding one letter results in a different word.
6. Choose some letters or patterns by which to sort.
7. Choose four transfer words---uncommon words you can read and spell based on the rhyming words.
8. Store the cards in an envelope. On the envelope, write the words in order, the patterns for which you will sort, and transfer words.

Makes:	3	4	5	7
	red	ride	dries	spiders
	rid	side	spies	
		pies	spied	
			pried	
			pride	
			press	
			dress	
Sorts:	pr, ps, ide, s(plural)			
Transfer:	slide, slides, tries			

Spiders
(letters: eidprss)

Making Words with Cubes Game

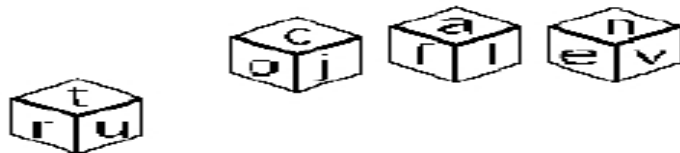
TIP: Use charts and word banks to categorize words according to patterns. This facilitates word recognition for ELLs.

Purpose: To help students apply sounds in words as they build with letters.

Materials: Use letter cubes from games or playing pieces can be made from blank wooden cubes, black permanent marker, timer, paper and pencil

Procedure:

- The teacher prepares wooden cubes by writing all the vowels on one cube to be sure that a vowel always lands face up. The teacher puts a variety of consonants on five or six other cubes.
- Students, in pairs, take turns being the player and the recorder. The recorder writes the words made by the player.
- Letters are shaken and spilled out onto the table and the timer is started.
- Students move the cubes about to create words and spell them to the recorder. The letters can be moved around to make more words. Optional: The words can be written in columns by the letters in the words.
- Students review the words and check for accuracy. Words are then scored. Count up the total number of letters used. Students soon realize that the bigger the words, the greater their score.



1	2	3	4
a	at an	can tan rat	scat snag

Word Stringing

TIP: Provide students with brief definitions or synonyms to help them understand these words. Using sentences provides students with important practice reading the phonograms in context.

Purpose: To help students identify known parts of a word in addition to the prefixes and suffixes that can be added. By understanding how words are put together, students are better able to take words apart when decoding or spelling.

Materials: List of thirty-seven common phonograms, board

Procedures:

1. Teacher selects a rime from the 37 Key Rimes Chart.
2. Teacher makes a list of words that contain that rime by substituting initial consonants (single, blends, and digraphs) and by adding prefixes and suffixes. If applicable, have one or two compound words on the list.

-ight

sight	night
moonlight	midnight
might	light
mighty	lightening
fright	frighten
fright	frightening

3. Students write the rime **ight**, (pause). Explain that they will be adding letters to the beginning and ending of the phonogram to make words. Tell them to write **ight** again; add a letter to make it say **sight**. After they have written the word, write the word on the board so that they may check the spelling.
4. Teacher continues this by having students write the words dictated.
5. Finally, dictate a sentence that uses four or more of the words made. For example, “**At midnight the moonlight helped us see the frightening sight.**”
6. Follow-up: Have students write sentence(s) that use at least two of the words. Share in pairs.

The 37 Most Useful Phonograms

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

Pick Up (Sight Words)

TIP: Sight words need to be taught and reinforced through oral language development.

Purpose: To reinforce the automatic recognition of sight words.

Materials: List of sight words on word cards.

Procedures:

1. The teacher places 2-4 word cards face up on the table.
2. The teacher says, "Pick up the word that says _____."
3. The student finds the word card and picks it up.
4. The teacher reverses roles. "I'll be the student and you'll be the teacher." The student then says, "Pick up the word that says _____."
5. The teacher finds the word card and picks it up.
6. The teacher continues by asking the student to pick up words that follow a pattern.

Examples:

"Pick up the words that begin with the sound of /r/ as in rabbit."

"Pick up words that rhyme with _____."

"Pick up words that end with the sound /t/ as in rabbit."

"Pick up words that end with _____."

Use of Poetry for Reinforcing Sight Words

TIP: Read and recite poems that motivate students to enjoy the sounds and rhythms of the English language.

Purpose: To reinforce and practice the recognition of sight words through the use of poetry.

Materials: Poetry containing sight words, chart paper, poem posters

Procedures:

1. Students should practice choral reading of poetry as it enhances their awareness of sounds of language and patterns of speech, thus developing their phonological awareness and recognition of sight words. Poetry offers students the opportunity to interpret written language, figures of speech, and author's purpose.
2. These poems may be presented in a variety of ways:
 - A poetry basket: a collection of poetry charts or books that the student has read with the teacher or has learned during shared reading
 - A poetry book that is easily accessible so that students can take one or two "poetry breaks" throughout the day
 - A notebook or book of poems created, illustrated, and published by students which can be reread during independent reading time
 - Displays of poems or charts around the room to entice students to read and recite

* *The above mentioned activities for sight words can also be used to develop fluency.*

Concept Sort

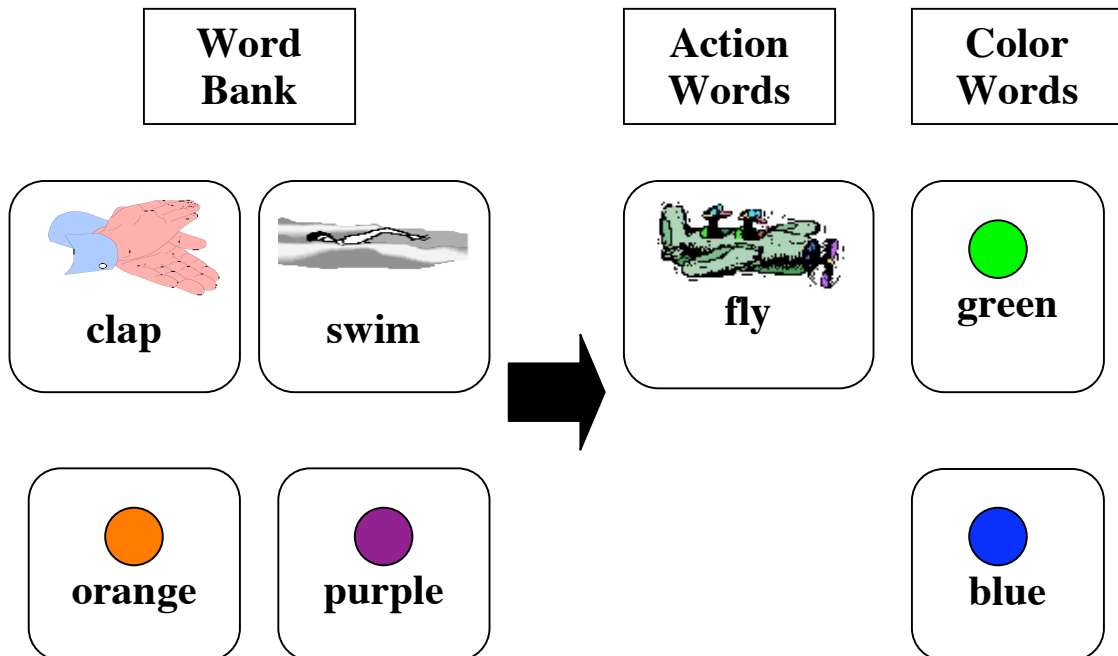
TIP: Add pictures to help students remember the words.
Remove pictures once students can read the words.

Purpose: To help students practice and bring meaning to sight words by sorting them according to concepts.

Materials: List of sight words that can be equally divided into at least two concept sorts, e.g. action words and color words.

Procedure:

1. The teacher selects two sets of word cards from the word bank that share similarities.
For example:
 - a set of color words and a set of action words;
 - a set of people words and a set of animal words.
2. The teacher asks the students to sort the words into two groups. “Find all the color words and put them in this group. Find all the action words and put them in this group.”
3. Students read the words aloud to practice oral language and sort them into appropriate piles.
4. Students may use the words in sentences as reinforcement.



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