

## Word Analysis Skills

Many beginning learners find the following approaches to reading and writing skills a useful way to decipher a page of written text or write a simple passage. They include using:

- Phonics
- Word structure
- Word families
- Sight words and phrases
- Spelling
- Grammar

To begin, you and your learner may decide to focus on only one or two of these skills, depending on her interest and learning style. Many beginning learners appreciate using manipulatives to practice spelling and word formation. Scrabble tiles, flash cards, and word wheels are manipulatives that can make these lessons more accessible.

### *Phonics*

Phonics is a method for teaching speakers of English to read and write. When teaching phonics, start by showing your learner how to connect the sounds (phonemes) of [spoken English](#) with letters or groups of letters (e.g. the sound /k/ can be represented by *c*, *k*, *ck*, *cc*, *ch*, or *que* spellings). Then teach your learner to “segment” the sounds (i.e. to say each sound separately). And finally, teach her to “blend” the sounds of letters together to produce an approximate pronunciation of an unknown word.

Following are some tips for using phonics.

### *Phonetic rules*

The traditional method of teaching phonics has been to teach children various phonetic rules. There are 166 phonetic rules and 45 exceptions (Smith, 1985).

For example:

- When two vowels go walking, the first vowel does the talking *e.g., boat, beat* – exception: *chief*). This rule works 45% of the time.
- When ‘c’ is followed by an ‘o’ or ‘a’, the sound of ‘K’ is heard *e.g., camp*, no exceptions. This rule works 100% of the time.

Some students find phonetic rules very helpful, whereas other people find them confusing. Phonetic rules are often best understood by people who already know how to read. The most useful way to demonstrate the principles of phonetic rules is to give examples of how the rules work.

- The presence of the ‘e’ at the end of the word makes the vowel say its name, *e.g., mat/mate, not/note, cat/cake*.

### **Teach initial consonant sounds**

Help your student learn the sounds of consonants at the beginning of words. The following consonants are almost always pronounced the same at the beginning of words with only a few exceptions like the silent ‘k’ in knife and knight. (Note that teaching consonant sounds at the end of words can also be very helpful to beginning readers.)

b	bad	l	leg	s	sandwich
d	doughnut	m	money	t	telephone
f	fun	n	name	v	van
h	hand	p	pen	w	water
j	jacket	q(u)	quarter	z	zipper
k	key	r	radio		

The consonants ‘c’ and ‘g’ can be pronounced two different ways at the beginning of a word.

c	cat	g	gas
	city		gem

There are 8 pairs of consonants that represent one sound.

ch	<i>as in</i>	chair	sh	<i>as in</i>	shoe
ch	<i>as in</i>	choir	th	<i>as in</i>	this
ch	<i>as in</i>	chute	th	<i>as in</i>	thumb

ph    *as in*    phone                      wh    *as in*    wheel

Start with words that your student uses and is comfortable with to begin learning consonant sounds. The source could be a language experience story, your student's personal dictionary, or survival sight words.

Look for patterns in words that give your student trouble when she reads. Compile a list of words starting with the same consonant sound.

### ***Teach vowel sounds***

Vowels are the most difficult to teach since there are so many exceptions to the rules. Most phonics programs start by teaching short vowels. For example:

a      man                      i      sit                              u      cup  
e      get                        o      mop

### ***Sounding out words—developing a phonemic awareness***

When your student encounters an unknown word, help her sound it out. Make sure that she hears the sounds of each letter or letter group.

### ***Limitations of phonics***

#### ***English as a second dialect***

Some students may use a different dialect, which means they may pronounce words differently than standard English. For example, the word *three* may be pronounced as *tree*. Be aware of these differences in pronunciations to decide whether phonics is an appropriate tool for your student. You can discuss these differences in pronunciation with your student.

#### ***Importance of meaning***

There is a critical difference between merely sounding out words and understanding what is being said. Reading words in context ensures that students understand what they are reading and are not just sounding out the words in isolation. Beginning readers often focus most of their attention on decoding words and not on the meaning of the words.

#### ***Avoid nonsense drills***

Phonics works best when used while you are reading or writing with your student. Avoid repetition of small words and drills of nonsense syllables. However, you can create games that build your student's knowledge of phonics, for example, how many words starting with 'b' can you write in one minute, or brainstorm homonyms (words that

share the same spelling *and* the same pronunciation but have different meanings).

### Word familiarity is key

Phonics helps readers predict the pronunciation of an unknown word. Discuss strategies they can use to figure out an unfamiliar word.

### Phonics is complicated

Beginning readers using phonics not only have to deal with the number of rules to be applied, but also when to apply the exceptions.

### Phonics can be confusing

Beginning readers are often interested in sounds of letters. They may look for common patterns in spelling and may find the many variations confusing—both to read and to spell. It is often best to start with the “simple” spellings (e.g. /f/ as in fish) and, only later, introduce the more “complex” spellings (e.g. /f/ as in photograph).

Some individuals find phonics very helpful and others do not! Let your student lead the way when using phonics.

## Word Structure

Discuss with your student how words are structured.

- Compound words and other big words

compound words: newspaper, lawn mower

big words: continent, industrial

**Note:** Encourage your student to look for small words or familiar components in new words.

- Prefixes

mis (wrong)

misinform

re (to do again)

redo, remove

- Suffixes

able learnable

er driver

tion participation

ture structure

- Root Words

graph (means writing or printing) graphology, biography, telegraph, geography

- Plural

es makes the words plural ending with s, ss, ch, sh, x  
s makes all other words plural with a few exceptions

Some exceptions are:

child	children
fish	fish or fishes
foot	feet
goose	geese
moose	moose

– Syllables

Show your student how words are broken into syllables by stopping at the end of each syllable as you say the word.

*in-sti-tu-tion*

## Word Families

There are many groups of words that either begin with or end with the same letters and have the same sound. Tongue twisters, poems, and songs are often built around word families. Repetition is an important part of learning decoding skills.

Examples of word families

words that rhyme	book, look, mistook
words with the same base	abuse, misuse, confuse

With beginning readers, focus on word families that are spelled in a similar way. As your student gains confidence and knowledge about word families, you can talk about words that are spelled the same but have different sounds.

red	lead	lead	breed
fed	bread	mead	feed
Ted	tread	read	seed

## Sight Words

Sight words are words that readers recognize instantly without having to sound them out. As a person becomes a more proficient reader, they begin to recognize more and more words by sight. Their reading speed increases since they no longer have to stop and sound out every word or try to figure it out from context. As the speed improves, so will the comprehension. A tutor needs to help the student get to the point where most of the words they read are “sight words”.

Sight words could include:

- Short high frequency words and recognized automatically by fluent readers (e.g., of, it, she, he, I).
- Words that have special meaning to the reader and appear frequently in material related to the student’s own life or job situation (e.g., inflammable).
- Words that have sounds, which the student has not learned yet (such as long vowel sounds).
- Words that cannot be sounded out as they have irregular spelling and need to be memorized (e.g., through, tough, though and cough).
- Words that the student has difficulty remembering.
- Print the words you select on flash cards. Better yet, let the student make the cards with your help.
- Introduce no more than ten new words at each lesson. Do not drill the student for long periods of time.
- To make it easier for the student, introduce short vowel words first.
- Ask the student to use the word in a sentence if they have trouble remembering what the word on the card. Write the sentence on the back of the flash card as a memory device.
- Encourage the student to practice reviewing the flash cards at home. Review often!

***Social sight words and phrases***

Here is a list of words and phrases that your student may want to learn. Check with your student to see which words or phrases are relevant to them. You and your student may want to develop your own list.

Adults Only Ask Attendant for Key	High Voltage  In Inflammable Information Instructions	Office Open Out Out of Order
Best Before Beware Beware of the Dog Bus Stop	Keep Away Keep Closed at all Times Keep Off (the grass) Keep Out	Pedestrians Prohibited Please Recycle Police Station Pop Cans Only Post Office Post No Bills
Caution Closed Condemned		

Danger	Ladies	Private
Dentist	Last Chance for Gas	Private Property
Don't Talk	Listen	Pull
Do Not Cross	Live Wires	Push
Do Not Enter	Look	Rest Rooms
Do Not Refreeze		Recyclable
Doctor (Dr.)	Men	Smoking Area
Down	Men Working	Smoking Prohibited
Elevator		Step Down
Emergency Exit	Newspapers Only	Stop
Employees Only	Next Window	This End Up
Entrance	No Admittance	This Side Up
Exit	No Cheques Cashed	Trespassers will be
Exit Only	No Credit Cards Accepted	Prosecuted
Fire Escape	No Dogs Allowed	
Fire Extinguisher	No Dumping	Use Before (date)
First Aid	No Fires	Use Other Door
Flammable	No Fishing	
Fragile	No Hunting	Violators will be Prosecuted
Gentlemen	No Loitering	
Glass and Bottles Only	No Minors	Walk
Handle with Care	No Parking	Wanted
Hands Off	No Smoking (area)	Warning
Hel	No Spitting	Washrooms
	No Swimming	Watch your Step
	No Trespassing	
	Nurse	

## Spelling

Helping your student learn how to spell should be part of the writing activity on which you are working. Teaching the spelling of words in isolation is not as effective as helping your student learn to spell words that he actually uses in a context relevant to him. Keep in mind that marking all the words that are not spelled correctly in your student's writing is not helpful; it may remind him of negative experiences in school and lead to feelings of frustration.

As you are working on editing a piece of writing with your student, there are some suggestions and strategies you can use to help him with his spelling.

- A useful approach is to ask your student to identify which words in his writing he thinks are not spelled correctly. You will be amazed at how accurate this method can be.

- If there are many words, choose only a few—perhaps three or four—on which to focus.
- Ask your student to try writing the word another way to see if it “looks right.” He may have been in a hurry when he was writing and all he needs to do is re-read his work.
- Ask your student to sound out the word, making sure he enunciates clearly. Help him if he is having trouble. This helps isolate parts of the word and may make it easier for him to spell.
- Give the correct spelling to your student if he is still unable to do it himself. Ask him to copy it a few times and then to write it from memory. Always have him check to see if he is right. Continue with other work and go back to the word after a while. If he can still write the word correctly, he has probably learned it.
- Ask your student to add the word to his word bank. He can always look it up if he forgets and it is much simpler for a beginning writer than using a regular dictionary.
- Have the student break the word into syllables as he writes it (e.g., *won/der/ful*).
- Use memory aids (mnemonics) to help remember the spelling of words.

The boy felt **guilty** because he spilled **fruit juice** on his new **suit** and **ruined** it.

The **elephant** had his **photograph** taken speaking on the **telephone**.

There are three ‘e’s buried in a **cemetery**.

A **piece** of **pie**.

A **friend** to the **end**.

A **potato** has no **toe**.

- If you are using a computer, do not hesitate to use a spell checker and teach your student how to use it. It is an effective tool as it gives your student various word options and he has to pick the right one. Also, everyone who uses a computer uses this program so there is no stigma associated with it. Emphasize, however, that this is not a foolproof method because the computer does not always know what word you are intending to use.

## **Grammar**

At this stage, it is not important to place too much emphasis on written grammar. It is more important to focus on helping the learner focus on word analysis skills. You can help your student learn to assess her grammar by reading what she has written out loud to see if it makes

sense. Making sure there is agreement between verbs and nouns can be a first step, however, it is important at this stage to keep a balance between correcting every mistake and working towards writing that makes sense. Be aware of the focus of your lesson; remember you can use the same piece of writing for a number of learning activities. Students at the beginning level often find it easier and less intimidating if they are only correcting one thing at a time.

### ***Language skills***

To learn to read, your student needs to have acquired basic language skills. The first steps in learning to read are listening with understanding and speaking. This has huge implications for students who may speak English as their second (or third language) as well as for students who speak English as their first language but have language delays.