



Part II: Phonics Instruction

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Part II in this series focuses on research-based Phonics Instruction strategies that have been proven to increase reading skills. Phonics Instruction was identified by the 2000 National Reading Panel as a leading teaching method which consistently improves reading skills (Armbruster, Lehr and Osborn, 2001).

What is Phonics Instruction?

Phonics Instruction teaches students how letters correspond to different sounds and is sometimes referred to as: grapho-phonemic relationships, letter/sound associations or correspondence, sound/symbol correspondence and sound spellings. The goal in teaching this skill is to help students learn the systematic and predictable relationships between written letters (graphemes) and spoken sounds (phonemes).

Effective Ways to Teach Phonics Instruction:

Phonics Instruction is most effectively taught when selected sets of letter-sound relationships are taught explicitly in a logical and sequential order. Systematic and explicit Phonics Instruction works best when it is introduced early and in Kindergarten and First grade, it has been shown to improve word recognition and spelling skills. Beginning at second grade, more complex patterns of letters are presented and students continue to benefit as they receive direct instruction in decoding words with multiple syllables (Beck, Farr and Strickland, 2003). Phonics Instruction significantly improves reading comprehension and is extremely helpful for students with reading difficulties.

Early Reading Approaches to Teaching Phonics Instruction Include:

Synthetic Phonics/Word Blending: Students are taught the sounds of letters and letter combinations, and then are instructed on how these sounds blend together into a familiar word. For example, /b/, /a/, /t/ blend together to make "bat."

Word Building: Students practice making words by using previously taught letter/sound relationships. This approach helps students to focus on both the individual letters and the sequence of letters in each word. Student learn how the same letters in different order can make totally different words and learn how just adding one or two letters to a known word can

change the word's meaning. For Example, when you add "s" to the beginning of "top" you get the new word "stop."

Analytic Phonics: Students take previously learned words and study the letter/sound relationships within those words. Analytic Phonics teaches sounds within the context of words and does not focus on isolated sounds. For Example, the word "said" has the sounds /s/, /e/, /d/. Instead of having students sound out every letter sound, students learn that within the context of this word, "ai" makes the /e/ sound.

Analogy-Based Phonics: Students use word families to learn new words which have similar parts. For example, by changing the beginning of the word "dog," you can make "log", "bog", "fog" and "hog."

Phonics Through Spelling: Students break words down into sound segments (phonemes), and then write the words down by writing letters for each sound segment. For example, the word "car" is broken down into the sounds /c/, /a/, /r/ and students convert each of those sounds into their written letter symbols.

Onset-Rime Phonics Instruction: While presenting one-syllable words, teachers focus on identifying the sounds that occur before the first vowel (the onset) and the sound of the remaining part of the word (the rime). For Example, the word "red" would be presented as /r/ -/ed/.

Embedded Phonics: While reading a passage, students are taught letter-sound relationships. This approach is not systematic or explicit, because random letter-sounds are taught as the students read.

Advanced Reading Approaches to Teaching Phonics Instruction Include:

Identifying Syllable Boundaries: Students learn to break words into their syllable parts. This allows students to chunk letter patterns into smaller, easier to digest units while sounding out and comprehending long, unfamiliar words. For example, "impossible" is simply divided up by its' syllables: im-pos-si-ble.

Identifying Syllable Types: Students learn the different possible combinations of consonant and vowel sounds within English language syllables. Consonants and vowels are symbolized as "C" and "V," allowing the student to see the predictable patterns within our written language. For example, "matter" and "powder" are both represented as CVCCVC.

Isolating Affixes: Students learn how to identify prefixes and suffixes and learn how these affect the root meaning of words. For example, the meaning of the word "credible" is drastically altered when the prefix "in" changes the word to "incredible."

Blending Syllables: Students apply phonics knowledge to the blending of syllables within the sequence of letters in multi-syllable words. For example, the word "impalpable" is broken down sequentially into /im-pal-pe-bel/. The basics of phonics are used to help students read even the most indiscernible of words.