Guidelines for Examining Phonics & Word Recognition Programs

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Inroduction

The goals of Beginning Reading Instruction are many, but primarily include that children learn to read with confidence and fluency, that they understand what they read, and that they find reading a source of both knowledge and enjoyment. To enable all children to achieve these goals, beginning reading instruction programs must offer balanced instruction that provides children with a variety of experiences.

Some of these experiences help children get meaning from what they read. Other experiences acquaint children with the forms and functions of printed language. Still other experiences focus children's attention on the sounds of spoken language, the symbols of written language, and word recognition.

To become successful readers, children must have all these experiences. Getting meaning from print depends on rapid word recognition, which in turn depends on the ability to relate speech sounds to letters and letter patterns, quickly and accurately. Each type of experience is important to children's reading success and contributes to the effectiveness of beginning reading programs.

A full discussion of all the dimensions of a balanced program of beginning reading instruction is beyond the scope of this guide. Rather, as the title states, this booklet focuses on instruction in phonics and word recognition programs.

Research-Based Reading Instruction

Phonics and Word Recognition Instruction in Commercially Published Programs

Commercially published phonics and word recognition programs generally appear in two forms:

1 **as one dimension of a large basal reading program, or**

2 **as the entire focus of a supplemental program.**

Basal Reading Programs

Many teachers teach phonics and word recognition by using a basal reading program that has been adopted by the local school district. Typically such a program includes a teacher's guide, grade-level reading materials for students, and ancillary materials that support the primary components of the program. In these programs, phonics and word recognition activities are embedded in a sequence of instruction that includes reading of big books and trade books, use of predictable or patterned stories, writing activities, and a range of extension activities.

Supplemental Programs

Some teachers use commercially published phonics and word recognition supplemental programs that extend instruction along with the instruction in their regular basal reading programs. In addition, parents often acquire supplemental programs for use at home to support or extend the instruction their children are receiving in school.

Hundreds of such supplemental programs are now available, and new programs appear regularly. Some of these programs have a traditional "print" form that features board and card games, flash cards, word lists, storybooks, and workbooks. Other programs combine traditional print materials with audio tapes, electronic games, video tapes, and computer software.

Different supplemental programs have been developed to be used in different ways. Some require teacher direction; others claim to be student directed, in that students can proceed through them independently and at their own pace. Some programs are limited in scope and require only a few minutes of instructional time per day while others present an array of teacher and student materials and activities that can take a large amount of daily classroom instructional time.

Whereas some phonics and word recognition programs are intended for use with young children who are learning to read, other programs claim that they can be used by students of any age, from young children who are learning to read, to middle-school students who have not learned to read with fluency, and to adults who have not learned to read well—or at all.

Purpose of the Guidelines

The purpose of this booklet is to provide you with various guidelines to use as you evaluate phonics and word recognition programs to determine if they reflect sound, research-based and classroom-tested instructional practices. The guidelines in this booklet can be used to evaluate the instruction found in both basal reading programs and supplemental programs.

Recognizing that it can be very difficult to talk about phonics and word recognition because different people hold different understandings of what these terms mean, as they are used in this booklet, the terms are defined as follows:

Phonics refers to a system of instruction that helps children develop an understanding of the alphabetic principle—the idea that the letters and letter patterns of written language represent the sounds of spoken language.

Word recognition refers to the ability to associate a printed word with its meaning, or to "decode" the word.

Overview of the Guide

Part 1 of the booklet provides information about the content of effective phonics and word recognition instruction, along with various guidelines for program examination and evaluation.

Part 2 discusses reading aloud and independent reading. These particular areas receive attention in this guide because, along with phonics and word recognition, they contribute directly to children's ability to comprehend what they read, and are central to effective reading instruction.

Part 3 contains checklists that may be useful as you examine the phonics and word recognition instruction found in either basal reading programs or supplemental programs.

Part 4 contains a list of references to which you may refer for further information about phonics and word recognition instruction.

Part 1: The Content of Phonics and Word Recognition Instruction

Although concerned educators may disagree over the exact role phonics and word recognition instruction should play in beginning reading, most educators do agree that such instruction is important, and that it should be part of a total beginning reading program. Instruction in phonics and word recognition is important because good reading, or reading with fluency and comprehension, is largely dependent on the ability of a reader to recognize printed words quickly and accurately, and then link the words with their meanings.

The goals of phonics and word recognition instruction are to help children understand

- **that there are systematic relationships between letters and sounds,**
- **that written words are composed of letter patterns that represent the sounds of spoken words, and**
- **that learning to recognize words quickly and accurately is a way of obtaining meaning from what is read.**

Important Elements of Phonics and Word Recognition Instruction

Effective phonics and word recognition instruction builds steadily on children's understanding and use of both spoken and written language, and includes the following elements:

Print Awareness—awareness of the forms and functions of printed language.

Alphabetic Knowledge—knowledge of the shapes and names of letters of the alphabet.

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness—awareness of and the ability to manipulate the sounds of spoken English words.

The Alphabetic Principle—understanding that there is a systematic relationship between the sounds of spoken English and the letters and letter patterns of written English.

Decoding—understanding how to read each letter or letter pattern in a word to determine the word's meaning.

Irregular/High-Frequency Words—recognition of words that appear often in printed English, but are not readily decodable in the early stages of reading instruction.

Spelling and Writing—understanding how to translate sound-letter relationships and spelling patterns into written communication.

Reading Practice with Decodable Texts—application of information about sound-letter relationships to the reading of readily decodable texts.

Reading Fluency—practice in reading a variety of texts so that reading becomes easy, accurate, and expressive.

The following discussion looks at each of the above elements of instruction. The discussion of each element is followed by various guidelines for you to consider as you evaluate phonics and word recognition programs. The guidelines are based both on time-tested, well-respected research and on information gained from effective classroom practices.

Print Awareness

Children's awareness of the forms and functions of print has been identified as perhaps the most important concept that young children must develop. This is because awareness of the forms and functions of print is the first step toward awareness of letter shapes, names, sounds, and, eventually, of words. Therefore, print awareness is essential to children's motivation for learning to read.

Children with print awareness can begin to understand that written language is related to oral language. They see that, like spoken language, printed language carries messages and is a source of both enjoyment and information. Children who lack print awareness are unlikely to become successful readers. Indeed,

children's performance on print awareness tasks is a very reliable predictor of their future reading achievement.

Most children become aware of print long before they enter school. They see print all around them, on signs and billboards, in alphabet books and storybooks, and in labels, magazines, and newspapers. Seeing print and observing adults' reactions to print helps children recognize its various forms.

This is not to suggest that the ability to understand how print works emerges magically and unaided. This understanding comes about through the active intervention of adults and other children who point out letters, words, and other features of the print that surrounds children. It is when children are read to regularly, when they play with letters and engage in word games, and later, when they receive formal reading instruction, that they begin to understand how the system of print functions; that is, that print on a page is read from left to right and from top to bottom; that sentences start with capital letters and end with periods, and much, much more.

As they participate in interactive reading with adults, children also learn about books—authors' and illustrators' names, titles, tables of content, page numbers, and so forth. They also learn about book handling—how to turn pages, how to find the top and bottom on a page, how to identify the front and back cover of a book, and so forth. As part of this learning, they begin to develop the very important concept "word"—that meaning is conveyed through words; that printed words are separated by spaces; and that some words in print look longer (because they have more letters) than other words.

Books with predictable and patterned text can play a significant role in helping children develop and expand print awareness. Typically these books are not decodable—that is, they are not based on sound-letter relationships, spelling patterns, and irregular/high-frequency words that have been taught, as are decodable texts. Rather, predictable and patterned books, as the name implies, are composed of repetitive or predictable text, for example:

> **Two cats play on the grass.**
>
> **Two cats play together in the sunlight.**
>
> **Two cats play with a ball.**
>
> **Two cats play with a toy train.**
>
> **Two cats too tired to play.**

Most often, the illustrations in such books are tied closely to the text, in that the illustrations represent the content words that change from page to page.

As they hear and participate in the reading of the simple stories found in predictable and patterned books, children become familiar with how print looks on a page. They develop book awareness and book-handling skills, and begin to become aware of print features such as capital letters, punctuation marks, word boundaries and differences in word lengths.

Awareness of print concepts provides the backdrop against which reading and writing are best learned.

Guidelines for Instruction To Promote Print Awareness

The program includes activities that:

1. help children understand the relationship between spoken and written language
2. reinforce the forms and functions of print found in classroom signs, labels, posters, calendars, and so forth
3. teach and reinforce print conventions such as print directionality, word boundaries, capital letters, and end punctuation
4. teach and reinforce book awareness and book handling
5. promote word awareness by helping children identify word boundaries and compare words
6. allow children to practice what they are learning by listening to and participating in the reading of predictable and patterned stories and books
7. provide practice with predictable and patterned books
8. provide many opportunities for children to hear good books and to participate in read-aloud activities

Alphabetic Knowledge

Children's knowledge of letter names and shapes is a strong predictor of their success in learning to read. Knowing letter names is strongly related to children's ability to remember the forms of written words and their ability to treat words as sequences of letters. Not knowing letter names is related to children's difficulty in learning letter sounds and in recognizing words. Indeed, it is unreasonable to think that children will understand and apply the alphabetic principle until they can recognize and name a number of letters.

Children whose alphabetic knowledge is not well developed when they start school need sensibly organized instruction that will help them identify, name, and write letters. Once children are able to identify and name letters with ease, they can begin to learn letter sounds and spellings.

Children appear to acquire alphabetic knowledge in a sequence that begins with letter names, then letter shapes, and finally letter sounds. Children learn letter names by singing songs such as the "Alphabet Song," and by reciting rhymes. They learn letter shapes as they play with blocks, plastic letters, and alphabet books. Informal but planned instruction in which children have many opportunities to see, play with, and compare letters leads to efficient letter learning. This instruction should include activities in which children learn to identify, name, and write both upper case and lower case versions of each letter.

Guidelines for Alphabetic Knowledge Instruction

The program:

1 **includes games, songs, and other activities that help children identify and name letters.**

2 **provides activities in which children learn upper case and lower case forms of letters.**

3 **offers writing activities that encourage children to practice making the letters they are learning.**

4 **offers writing activities in which children have the opportunity to experiment with and manipulate letters to make words and messages.**

5 **uses a sequence of letter introduction that can be adjusted to the needs of children.**

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

To discuss phonological and phonemic awareness, it is important to understand a few terms: phonemes are the separable, individual sounds in a word. They are the smallest units of spoken language. Onsets and rimes are larger than phonemes, but smaller than syllables. An onset is the initial single phoneme in a word and a rime is the remaining set of phonemes in a word. For example, take bat and bright, both one-syllable words:

in *bat*, the onset is /b/ and the rime is /at/;

in *bright*, /br/ is the onset and the rime is /ight/.

In contrast:

***bat* contains three phonemes—/b/ /a/ /t/;**

***bright* contains four phonemes—/b/ /r/ /i/ /t/**

The sequence of phonological and phonemic awareness instruction usually begins with larger units of speech sounds and progresses to the smallest unit. Typically, children first learn to identify rhyming words and to create their own rhymes. Then they learn that sentences are made up of separate words, and that words are composed of syllables and onsets and rimes. They then learn that words are made up of phonemes, and that phonemes can be separated, or segmented from words, and that they can be put together, or blended to make words.

Some children have a great deal of difficulty segmenting spoken words into sounds and blending segmented sounds together to make words. The ability to segment and blend, however, is crucial to reading development. It is this aspect of phonemic awareness that eventually enables children to apply their knowledge of letter-sound relationships to sound out words.

In introducing children to phonemes, some programs begin with blending and some with segmenting. The typical sequence of introduction is as follows: isolating and blending initial sounds; isolating and blending final sounds; isolating and blending medial sounds; and manipulating phonemes through deletion, addition, and substitution. These latter tasks can be very difficult for some children.

The earliest blending activities should use words that begin with continuous consonants (for example, *s, m, l, f, r*). These sounds are easy to hear and can be blended without distortion. The sounds should be stretched out and connected (or "sung") (*mmmmaaaatttt*), rather than separated (/m/ /a/ /t/).

It is important to note that activities designed to develop phonological and phonemic awareness in young children should be fun and take up only a small amount of total instructional time. The earliest levels of phonological and phonemic awareness activities usually involve oral tasks in the absence of print. Some programs include activities that have children use auditory (clapping) and visual (Elkonin boxes, counters, chips, blocks) cues to help them understand that words are made up of individual sounds that can be separated and counted. At the more advanced levels, phonemic awareness activities combine oral and written tasks so that sound and print can reinforce each other.

Guidelines for Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Instruction

The program:

1 provides activities that follow a sequence of instruction progressing from easier to more difficult tasks and from larger to smaller units of spoken language, for example:

- identifying and making rhymes
- dividing sentences into words
- dividing words into syllables
- segmenting and blending onsets and rimes
- identifying beginning, final, and medial phonemes in spoken words
- segmenting and blending individual phonemes in spoken words.

2 uses auditory and visual cues to help children understand how to identify, segment, and blend the sounds in spoken words.

3 starts with continuous sounds that are easier to blend.

4 advises teachers to stretch out and connect (or "sing") the sounds rather than separate them.

5 includes activities to teach the relationship of letters to sounds in more advanced phonemic awareness tasks.

The Alphabetic Principle

Children's reading development is dependent on their understanding of the alphabetic principle—the idea that letters and letter patterns represent the sounds of spoken language. Learning that there are predictable relationships between sounds and letters allows children to apply these relationships to both familiar and unfamiliar words and, thus, to begin to read with fluency. Two issues of importance in instruction in the alphabetic principle are the plan of instruction and the rate and sequence of instruction.

Plan of Instruction

Instruction in the alphabetic principle can be either explicit, implicit, or embedded.

Explicit instruction usually begins with the teacher focusing children's attention on isolated sounds, explicitly telling children the sounds represented by individual letters. In explicit instruction, the teacher might begin a lesson on the sound /l/ by writing the letter l on the board and saying, "This is the letter l, and it makes the sound /l/." The teacher next might help children read words by blending the /l/ sound with sounds of other letters that they have learned. For example, if the children have learned /l/, /a/, /m/, and /p/, they can make several words that contain /l/, including *lamp, lap, pal,* and *alp*. The teacher might end the lesson by having children practice what they have learned, perhaps by reading a simple story that contains a large number of words with the /l/ sound.

In contrast, implicit instruction helps children to identify the sounds associated with individual letters in the context of whole words rather than in isolation. Typically, children are asked to infer the sound of the letter from a word or set of words that contain the letter.

- **Write the word man on the board.**
- **Have children say man and listen for the beginning sound.**
- **Teach/show children that the letter *m* makes the sound /m/.**
- **Display and read several other words, such as *mitt, map,* and *mop,* and tell children that these words also begin with the /m/ sound.**
- **Display and read a list of words, some with and some without the /m/ sound (*cat, mug, met, bug, let*), and ask children to identify and say those words that have the /m/ sound.**

Another way to teach sound-spelling relationships is known as "embedded" instruction. In embedded instruction, a teacher might:

- **base sound-letter relationship instruction on rhyming word families.**
- **show children a word that contains the targeted sound-letter relationship.**
- **delete the word's onset, then direct children's attention to the spelling and sound of rime.**
- **help the children substitute onsets, and generalize the spelling pattern to new words.**

- **have children participate in repeated readings of trade books that contain words with the targeted sound-letter relationship.**
- **have children engage in related writing activities.**

Rate and Sequence of Introduction

No set rule governs how fast or how slow to introduce letter-sound relationships. One obvious and important factor to consider in determining the rate of introduction is the performance of the group of students with whom the instruction is to be used. Furthermore, there is no agreed upon order in which to introduce the letter-sound relationships. It is generally agreed, however, that the earliest relationships introduced should be those that enable children to begin reading words as soon as possible. That is, the relationships chosen should have high utility. For example, the spellings *m, a, t, s, p,* and *h* are high utility, whereas the spellings *x, gh,* as in *through, ey* as in *they,* and *a* as in want *are* of lower utility.

It is also a good idea to begin instruction in sound-letter relationships by choosing consonants such as *f, m, n, r,* and *s* whose sounds can be pronounced in isolation with the least distortion. Stop sounds at the beginning or middle of words are harder for children to blend than are continuous sounds.

Instruction should also separate the introduction of sounds for letters that are auditorally confusing, such as /b/ and /v/ or /i/ and /e/, or visually confusing, such as *b, d* or *p* and *g*.

Instruction might start by introducing two or more single consonants and one or two short vowel sounds. It can then add more single consonants and more short vowel sounds, with perhaps one long vowel sound. It might next add consonant blends, followed by digraphs (for example, *th, sh, ch*), which permits children to read common words such as *this, she,* and *chair*. Introducing single consonants and consonant blends or clusters should be introduced in separate lessons to avoid confusion.

The point is that the order of introduction should be logical and consistent with the rate at which children can learn. Furthermore, the sound-letter relationships chosen for early introduction should permit children to work with words as soon as possible.

Research suggests that explicit, teacher-directed instruction is more effective in teaching the alphabetic principle than is less-explicit and less-direct instruction.

Guidelines for Instruction in the Alphabetic Principle

Plan of Instruction

The program:

1. **teaches letter-sound relationships explicitly and in isolation.**
2. **provides opportunities for children to practice letter-sound relationships in daily lessons.**
3. **provides practice opportunities that include new sound-letter relationships, as well as cumulatively reviewing previously taught relationships.**

4 gives children opportunities early and often to apply their expanding knowledge of sound-letter relationships to the reading of phonetically spelled words that are familiar in meaning.

Rate and Sequence of Introduction

The program:

1 recognizes that children learn sound-letter relationships at different rates.

2 introduces sound-letter relationships at a reasonable pace, in a range from two to four letter-sound relationships a week.

3 teaches high-utility letter-sound relationships early.

4 introduces consonants and vowels in a sequence that permits the children to read words quickly.

5 avoids the simultaneous introduction of auditorially or visually similar sounds and letters.

6 introduces single consonant sounds and consonant blends/clusters in separate lessons.

7 provides blending instruction with words that contain the letter-sound relationships that children have learned.

Decoding

Once children gain an understanding of the alphabetic principle and are able to translate the letters and spelling patterns of written words into speech sounds rapidly and automatically, they can focus more attention on getting meaning from what they are reading.

Helping children learn to use their knowledge of sounds and letters to sound out and read words gives them a strategy for understanding text on their own. Without such a strategy, children tend to overrely on context to get meaning from words. Context, however, can be an unreliable way to identify and read words. This is not to suggest that children should not use context, rather that they should not rely only on context. Children should understand that when they encounter a word they do not recognize, they should use their knowledge of sound-letter relationships to approximate the word's pronunciation. Once they have done this, the information available to them from the context will be more helpful in figuring out the word's meaning.

Children should have opportunities to work with word families, spelling patterns, and onsets and rimes. More advanced decoding strategies focus on structural analysis—the identification of root words, prefixes and suffixes—and on how to read multisyllabic words.

Research-Based Reading Instruction

Guidelines for Decoding Instruction

The program:

1 provides children with opportunities to use their knowledge of sound-letter relationships to practice decoding.

2 helps children use context to confirm the meanings of words they have identified by applying their knowledge of sound-letter relationships.

3 provides children with structural analysis practice as a way to identify word parts and multisyllabic words.

Irregular and High-Frequency Words

Written English contains many common words that are "irregular," meaning that they are difficult to read using the "sounding out" decoding strategy-for example, *one, was, where, come, said,* and *have.*

In addition, it is difficult to write text for young children that is comprehensible and engaging without using a number of regular, decodable words—for example, *see, go, me, my, she, this, the,* and *why*—that contain sound-letter relationships that children may not have been taught. If children are to read stories and informational text, they must be able to identify by sight some of these "high-frequency" words.

A set of irregular/high-frequency words should be presented to children in a reasonable sequence and should be reviewed continuously in the lessons and written materials the children read.

Rebus books are a good way for children to develop a store of irregular/high-frequency words. In these books, words that the children cannot yet decode are represented by little pictures, or rebuses, and the irregular/high-frequency words that are the focus of instruction appear in repetitive text. It has been demonstrated that providing children with rebus books can make their transition into real reading easier.

Guidelines for Instruction in Irregular/High-Frequency Words

The program:

1 introduces a set of irregular words in a reasonable order and cumulatively reviews the words.

2 introduces a set of regular, high-frequency words in a reasonable order and cumulatively reviews them.

3 provides opportunities for children to see and become familiar with a set of high-frequency/irregular words through the use of rebus books.

Spelling and Writing

In early writing activities, children should be encouraged to use phonetic approximations of words, or invented spellings. Using invented spellings allows children to communicate their ideas in written language by applying what they know about sounds and letters. Helping children to create their own spellings encourages them to think about the sounds of words in relation to their written symbols. Consequently, the use of invented spelling can contribute to children's development in both reading and writing.

Some have expressed concerns that invented spelling might interfere with children's learning to spell correctly. Studies show that, for young children, using invented spellings promotes the ability to internalize formal spellings. Note, however, that although the use of invented spellings may be appropriate early in first grade, by the middle of first grade, children should be encouraged to use correct spellings. In first grade, spelling instruction should be coordinated with the program of reading instruction. (As children progress through the grades, they require well-organized, systematic lessons in spelling.)

As they write, children who are good spellers tend to use their knowledge of spelling patterns. Getting children to pay attention to spelling patterns contributes to their spelling success. Often this can be achieved simply by having children look at the spellings of words. Therefore, pointing out the spellings of words in print or writing the words on the board is more productive than spelling words aloud for children to write themselves.

In addition, the more children write, the more they become aware of common spelling patterns in words and of how words are spelled. Increasing their awareness of spelling patterns hastens their progress in reading, writing, and spelling.

Guidelines for Effective Spelling and Writing Activities

The program should contain activities that:

1. coordinate spelling instruction with instruction in sound-letter relationships and decoding strategies;

2. guide children to move from their own invented spellings to correct spellings;

3. include instruction that helps children to attend to spelling patterns in written words;

4. introduce systematic, organized spelling lessons later in the program; and

5. contain purposeful activities that permit children to respond in writing to what is read to them and to what they read, to express themselves creatively, and to communicate their ideas in writing.

Research-Based Reading Instruction

Reading Practice with Decodable Texts

To develop fluent word recognition, children must be encouraged to use and extend their knowledge of letters and spelling patterns and their associated sounds. Indeed, instruction in sound-letter relationships is of little value to children if they do not have ample opportunities to practice decoding words. For beginning readers, these practice opportunities can come from reading decodable texts, or texts in which most of the words are made up of sound-letter relationships that have been taught—with previously taught relationships reviewed cumulatively. Decodable texts may also contain a small set of irregular/high-frequency words that have been taught, and a limited number of "story" or "special" words to make the text more interesting and natural. In fact, it is very important that decodable texts be more than just a series of unrelated words and sentences. They must be coherent and comprehensible to reinforce for children the idea that the purpose of reading is to get meaning.

In addition, it is important that some of the words in the decodable texts be repeated and that some words are sufficiently unfamiliar to the children so that they must apply their knowledge of spelling patterns and decoding and not just repeat text that they have memorized. A way to accomplish this is to present children with a familiar word such as *sat,* then introduce a word that might be new to them in print, such as *mat.* Of course, the new word must be one containing previously taught relationships.

To illustrate, if children know the letters that represent the sounds /m/, /s/, /t/, /p/, /e/, and /a/; the high-frequency/irregular words *no, the, you,* and *said*; and the story words *elephant* and *thank,* they are able to read the following story:

Pat and the Elephant

Pat met the elephant.

The elephant met Pat.

Pat sat.

The elephant sat.

The elephant sat on the mat.

The elephant sat and sat.

Pat sat and sat.

Pat said, "Elephant, pat the pet."

The pet said, "No, thank you, Elephant."

After reading a decodable text, you and the children should discuss what the text is about. Discussion of text promotes comprehension and underscores the idea that the purpose of reading is to get meaning. Once everyone in the class has participated in reading and discussing a decodable text, children should be encouraged to reread it on their own, with partners, or at home.

Guidelines for Reading Practice with Decodable Texts

The program:

1 **contains opportunities for children to practice reading texts that contain a high proportion of words that conform to taught sound-letter relationships, particularly through the first stages of the program. These texts also should contain enough high-frequency, irregular, and story words to make them sound natural.**

2 **provides a sequence of texts, such that the letter-sound relationships the children have learned are cumulatively reviewed in the words of the texts.**

3 **provides texts that are engaging, coherent, and comprehensible.**

4 **provides opportunities for children to discuss what they read so as to promote comprehension and reinforce the purpose of reading.**

5 **gives children a variety of opportunities to reread the text.**

Reading Fluency

Reading fluency includes a combination of accuracy and rate. By increasing their reading fluency, children are able to direct to comprehension the attention they previously gave to word recognition.

For most children, fluency is developed by reading and rereading a large number of stories and informational texts that are appropriate to their level of reading ability. Repeated readings of these texts familiarizes young readers with difficult words and passages, which can lead to significant improvement in expression and comprehension, as well as fluency.

Directions for using repeated readings may present a procedure similar to the following:

- **Children are introduced to a new book.**
- **New or difficult words are introduced so that children can become familiar with them.**
- **The book is read with the children several times until they can read it on their own.**
- **The book is made available to children in a classroom library or reading center to read on their own, to read with partners, or to take home to read with family members.**

Another way to expose children to new books is through the use of audio tapes. These tapes should feature professional readers, teachers, other adults, or peers who read with fluency and expression. Children should also be encouraged to read at home. Information can be sent to families about how to help children read more. In particular, families should be encouraged to read aloud to their children frequently and to listen attentively and respond enthusiastically as children read and reread stories to them.

As children's fluency increases, they gain access to a wider range of reading materials that can be read independently. At this stage, decodability is no longer a constraint, so reading materials can be less hindered by vocabulary. Nevertheless, the materials children have available to read should "fit" their reading levels. As a general rule, children should be able to read 90 percent or more of the words in a text, and do so effortlessly. To gauge children's increasing fluency, it is a good idea to periodically conduct timed readings and to record individual progress.

Guidelines for Instruction To Promote Reading Fluency

The program:

1 provides children with opportunities to read and reread a range of stories and informational texts by reading on their own, partner reading, or choral reading.

2 introduces new or difficult words to children, and provides practice reading these words before they read on their own.

3 includes opportunities for children to hear a range of texts read fluently and with expression.

4 suggests ideas for building home-school connections that encourage families to become involved actively in children's reading development.

5 encourages periodic timing of children's oral reading and recording of information about individual children's reading rate and accuracy.

Part 2: Reading Aloud and Independent Wide Reading

The point of reading instruction is not that children learn to sound out words, but that they understand the meanings of the words, sentences, and texts they read. In addition to phonics and word recognition instruction, opportunities for children to hear and participate in read-aloud experiences and to engage in independent wide reading contribute directly to their ability to understand what they read.

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud experiences introduce children to the joys of imaginative worlds and the wonders of the real world that are accessible only through good stories and informational texts. From these experiences, children gain familiarity with how print works, and an understanding of why people read.

What kinds of books are best for reading aloud? In addition to predictable and patterned books, children need to hear and participate in reading books that excite their imaginations and expand their knowledge of the world. These books are characterized by demanding vocabulary and more complex sentences and by concepts that stretch children's imagination and knowledge.

The program of reading aloud should include a variety of genres—stories, nursery rhymes, poems, fables, fairy tales and informational text. Although everyone agrees that children love good stories and develop favorites that they want to hear again and again, they also need to hear and become familiar with the features of informational texts. Informational texts about, for example, animals, weather, planets, mational texts about, animals, weather, planets, stars, famous people, and how machines work will both fascinate children and introduce them to the kind of text structures they will encounter most often throughout their school years.

There are many ways to read books aloud to children—they can be read to the entire class or to groups of children; volunteers can read to individual children or to small groups. There is not one best time for reading aloud to occur—it can take place at any time of the school day.

Ideas for Reading Aloud to Children

Lots of good advice is available on how to read effectively to young children, but some common sense observations are important to keep in mind:

1. **With very young children who have not participated in a lot of reading-aloud activities, start with very short periods of reading; then gradually increase the story-reading period, to 15 minutes or more.**

2. **Make sure that the children are paying attention.**

3. **Read with expression and emotion, dramatizing exciting parts of books and changing voice pitch and tone for the lines of different characters.**

4. **Read interactively, that is, engage the children in the story by having them respond to questions, repeat phrases, predict what is going to happen next, and so forth.**

5. **Discuss the story after reading, calling on children to retell parts of the story.**

6. **Reread favorite stories, but remember to keep adding stories that will stretch the children's vocabulary, imagination, and knowledge of the world.**

7. **Read informational books as well as stories. Make sure the books have good—and accurate—illustrations and pictures.**

8. **Do not hesitate to change, or paraphrase the wording in a sentence or phrase the children might not understand. However, then return to the book and read the phrase or sentence as it appears.**

9. **Explain and sometimes act out the meanings of important words in the story that children might not be familiar with. Point to the details of illustrations or pictures that might help children understand the meanings of new words and complex sentences.**

10. **Remind children of the read-aloud book at other times of the day, try to find "every day" situations in which to use some of the words, phrases, and ideas from the story.**

Independent Wide Reading

As their reading proficiency develops, children need more and more opportunities to read on their own. In addition to its contribution to reading fluency, wide reading helps children build their vocabularies through experience with text in a variety of genres and forms, such as catalogs, magazines, books, and newspapers.

Children should have daily opportunities to read independently, and to discuss with each other the books they are reading on their own. Discussion is an excellent comprehension strategy. Through discussion, children share and interpret opinions, offer explanations, and raise and solve problems.

Classroom and school libraries must contain a variety of reading materials for children to choose for their independent reading—some materials that are easy to read and others that are more challenging. Little is gained by having beginning readers try to read books that are too difficult or making more-proficient readers choose from books that are too easy. Additionally, provisions need to be made so that children can take books home for reading independently or with family members.

Ideas for Promoting Independent Wide Reading

Classrooms that ensure wide reading provide:

1 **daily time for children to read both self-selected and teacher-and peer-recommended materials;**

2 **opportunities for children to discuss with each other what they are reading;**

3 **access to a variety of text genres and forms through classrooms and school libraries;**

4 **access to reading materials that reflect a range of reading levels; and**

5 **books that children can take home to read independently or to share with family members.**

Part 3: Program Evaluation Checklists

The following checklists are designed to help you organize information as you evaluate the phonics and word recognition instruction in either basal reading programs or supplemental programs. On Checklist 1, "General Program Information," you may record general information about different programs. On Checklist 2, "Program Evaluation Criteria," which summarizes the guidelines presented in Part 1 of this booklet, you may record information about the content of instruction in the programs you evaluate. Each checklist contains space to record information about three programs.

Once completed, the two checklists provide an efficient and effective method for making program comparisons.

Suggestions for Using Checklist 1: General Program Information

1 Before you begin your evaluation, make copies of the checklist. Make multiple copies if you have more than three programs to evaluate.

2 Sections A and B: Write the Name, Publisher, and Date of Publication for each program you evaluate.

3 Section C: Record the predominant medium of instruction in each program (teacher-directed lessons, print materials, audio tapes, video tapes, computer programs, etc.).

4 Section D: Record the type of any ancillary materials recommended in each program (workbooks, audio tapes, word pocket charts, etc.).

5 Section E: Record the target grade level or age group for which each program is intended (kindergarten, primary grades, remedial older students, students of all ages, etc.).

6 Section F: If your school needs a Spanish version of a program, ascertain if the program you are evaluating is available in Spanish.

7 Section G: Record any procedures in the program for placing students and assessing their progress.

8 Section H: Record information you acquire from the publishers' catalogs and from talking with their representatives about the availability of professional development materials and/or consultants to help teachers learn how to use the programs. Also record information about the costs of these professional development programs.

Suggestions for Using Checklist 2: Program Evaluation Criterria

1 Before you begin your evaluation, make copies of the checkllist. Make multiple copies if you have more than three programs to evaluate. The number you assign to a program on this checklist should correspond to the number you assigned to that program in Section A of Checklist 1.

2 Identify several lessons across a program to evaluate.

3 Score each element of instruction in a program on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating that the element is not present in the program, and 5 indicating that the program covers the element in depth.

Research-Based Reading Instruction

Checklist 1: General Program Information

	A Program Names and Publishers	B Publication Date	C Predominant Medium of Instruction	D Recommended Ancillary Materials	E Grade Level or Age Group
1					
2					
3					

	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3
F Is the program available in Spanish?	*Yes* *No*	*Yes* *No*	*Yes* *No*
G Placement and Assessment			
Does the program provide a procedure for placing students?	*Yes* *No*	*Yes* *No*	*Yes* *No*
Does the program provide procedures for assessing student progress?	*Yes* *No*	*Yes* *No*	*Yes* *No*
H Professional Development			
Are professional development materials and consultants available from the publisher?	*Yes* *No*	*Yes* *No*	*Yes* *No*

Research-Based Reading Instruction

Checklist 2: Program Evaluation Criteria

Record the number that best reflects the program's instruction for each of the guidelines on the checklist.

Not Present		Present		Covered in Depth
1	2	3	4	5

Print Awareness	1	2	3	Comments
The program contains activities that:				
help children to understand the relationship between spoken and written language.				
reinforce the forms and functions of print found in classroom signs, labels posters, calendars, and so forth.				
teach and reinforce print conventions such as print directionality, word boundaries, capital letters and end punctuation.				
teach and reinforce book awareness and book handling.				
promote word awareness by helping children identify word boundaries and compare word lengths.				
allow children to practice what they are learning through hearing.				
allow children to participate in the reading of predictable and patterned stories and books.				

Alphabetic Knowledge	1	2	3	Comments
The program:				
includes games, songs and other activities that help children learn to identify and name letters quickly.				
provides activities in which children learn upper case and lower case forms of letters.				
offers writing activities that encourage children to practice making the letters they are learning.				
offers writing activities in which children have the opportunity to experiment with and manipulate letters to make words and messages.				
uses a sequence of letter introduction that can be adjusted to the needs of children.				

Research-Based Reading Instruction

Checklist 2: Program Evaluation Criteria

Record the number that best reflects the program's instruction for each of the guidelines on the checklist.

Not Present		Present		Covered in Depth
1	2	3	4	5

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness	1	2	3	Comments
The program:				
provides activities that follow a sequence of instruction that progresses from easier to more difficult tasks and from larger to smaller units of spoken language.				
uses auditory and visual cues to help children understand how to identify, segment, and blend the sounds in spoken words.				
starts with continuous sounds that are easier to blend.				
advises teachers to stretch out and connect (or "sing") the sounds rather than separate them.				
includes activities to teach the relationships of letters to sounds in more advanced phonemic awareness tasks.				

Decoding	1	2	3	Comments
The program:				
provides children with opportunities to use their knowledge of sound-letter relationships to practice decoding.				
helps children use context to confirm the meanings of words they have identified by applying their knowledge of sound-letter relationships.				
provides children with structural analysis practice as a way to identify word parts and multisyllabic words.				

Irregular/High-Frequency Words	1	2	3	Comments
The program:				
introduces a set of irregular words in a reasonable order and cummulatively reviews them.				
introduces a set of regular high frequency words in a reasonable order and cumulatively reviews them.				
provides opportunities for children to see and become familiar with a set of irregular high-frequency words through the use of rebus books.				

Research-Based Reading Instruction

Alphabetic Principle	1	2	3	Comments
Plan of Instruction The program:				
teaches letter-sound relationships explicitly and in isolation.				
provides opportunities for children to practice letter-sound relationships in daily lessons.				
provides practice opportunities that include new sound-letter relationships, as well as cumulatively reviews of previously taught relationships.				
gives children opportunities early and often to apply their expanding knowledge of sound-letter relationships to the reading of phonetically spelled words that are similar in meaning.				
Rate and Sequence of Instruction The program:				
recognizes that children learn sound-letter relationships at different rates.				
introduces sound-letter relationships at a reasonable pace, in a range from two to four letter-sound relationships a week.				
in general, teaches high-utility letter sound relationships early.				
introduces consonants and vowels in a sequence that permits the childrento read words quickly.				
avoids simultaneous introduction of auditorially or visually similar sound and letters				
introduces single consonant sounds and consonant blend/clusters in separate lessons.				
provides blending instructions with words that contain the letter-sound relationships that the children have learned				

Research-Based Reading Instruction

Checklist 2: Program Evaluation Criteria

Record the number that best reflects the program's instruction for each of the guidelines on the checklist.

Not Present		Present		Covered in Depth
1	2	3	4	5

Speling and Writing	1	2	3	Comments
The program:				
contains activities that coordinate spelling instruction with instruction in sound-letter relationships and decoding strategies.				
guides children to move from their own invented spellings to correct spellings.				
includes instruction that helps children to attend to spelling patterns in written words.				
introduces systematic, organized spelling lessons later in the program.				
permits children to respond in writing to what is read to them and to what they read, to express themselves creatively, and to communicate their ideas in writing.				

Reading Practice with Decodable Texts	1	2	3	Comments
The program:				
contains opportunities for children to practice reading texts containing a high proportion of words that conform to taught sound-letter relationships, particularly through the first stages of the program, and enough high-frequency/irregular and story words to make them sound natural.				
provides a sequence of texts, such that the letter-sound relationships the children have learned are cumulatively reviewed in the words of the texts.				
provides texts that are engaging, coherent, and comprehensive.				
provides opportunities for children to discuss what they read, so as to promote comprehension and reinforce the purpose of reading.				
gives children a variety of opportunities to re-read the text.				

Checklist 2: Program Evaluation Criteria

Record the number that best reflects the program's instruction for each of the guidelines on the checklist.

Not Present		Present		Covered in Depth
1	2	3	4	5

Reading Fluency	1	2	3	Comments
The program:				
provides children with opportunities to read and re-read a range of stories and informational texts by, for example, reading on their own, partner reading, or choral reading.				
introduces new difficult words to children, and provides them with practice in reading these words before they read on their own.				
includes opportunities for children to hear a range of texts read fluently and with expression.				
suggests ideas for building home-school connections that encourage families to become involved actively in children's reading development.				
encourages periodic timing of children's oral reading and recording of information about individual children's reading rate and accuracy.				

Research-Based Reading Instruction

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COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

TITLE VI, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; THE MODIFIED COURT ORDER, CIVIL ACTION 5281, FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT, EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS, TYLER DIVISION

Reviews of local education agencies pertaining to compliance with Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 and with specific requirement of the Modified Court Order, Civil Action No. 5281, Federal District Court, Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division are conducted periodically by staff representatives of the Texas Education Agency. These reviews cover at least the following policies and practices:

(1) acceptance policies on student transfers from other school districts;
(2) operation of school bus routes or runs on a nonsegregated basis;
(3) nondiscrimination in extracurricular activities and the use of school facilities;
(4) nondiscriminatory practices in the hiring, assigning, promoting, paying, demoting, reassigning, or dismissing of faculty and staff members who work with children;
(5) enrollment and assignment of students without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin;
(6) nondiscriminatory practices relating to the use of a student's first language; and
(7) evidence of published procedures for hearing complaints and grievances.

In additional to conducting reviews, the Texas Education Agency staff representatives check complaints of discrimination made by citizen or citizens residing in a school district where alleged discriminatory practices have occurred or are occurring.

Where a violation of the Court Order in Civil Action No. 5281 that cannot be cleared through negotiation, the sanctions required by the Court Order are applied.

If there is a direct violation of the Court Order in Civil Action No. 5281 that cannot be cleared through negotiation, the sanctions required by the Court Order are applied.

TITLE VII, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 AS AMENDED BY THE EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 1972; EXECUTIVE ORDERS 11246 AND 11375; EQUAL PAY ACT OF 1964, TITLE IX, EDUCATION AMENDMENTS; REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AS AMENDED; 1974 AMENDMENTS TO THE WAGE-HOUR LAW EXPANDING THE AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 1967; VIETNAM ERA VETERANS READJUSTMENT ACT OF 1972 AS AMENDED; IMMIGRATION REFORM AND CONTROL ACT OF 1986; AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990; AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1991.

The Texas Education Agency shall comply fully with the nondiscrimination provisions of all federal and state laws, rules and regulations aby assuring that no person shall be excluded from consideration for recruitment, selection, appointment, training, promotion, retention, or any other personnel action, or be denied any benefits or participation in any educational programs or activities which it operates on the grounds of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or veteran status (except where age, sex or disability constitutes a bona fide occupational qualification necessary to proper and efficient administration). The Texas Education Agency is an Equal Employment Opportunity / Affirmative Action employer.