

Sadlier® School

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES

Seven Key Characteristics of Strong Phonics Instruction

Wiley Blevins, MEd

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INTRODUCTION

The important role of phonics in building the necessary foundational skills for reading has been well documented by research over the past 60 years (Chall, 1967; Anderson et al, 1985; Adams, 1990; Snow et al, 1998; NICHD 2000; Hattie, 2012; Wong, 2015). But not all phonics instruction is equal. In addition to being explicit and systematic, strong phonics instruction must include seven key ingredients for student success (Blevins, 2017, 2011, 2006, 2001). These include the following and are cornerstones of the Sadlier *From Phonics to Reading*™ program.



1 READINESS SKILLS

1. Phonemic Awareness

5 MIN

Oral Segmentation Tell children they will be segmenting, or breaking apart, words. Say the following words, one at a time: *bud; cup; hum; mud; fuss; nuts; runs; hums*. Ask children to segment each word sound by sound, then count the number of sounds. Provide corrective feedback by modeling how to segment the word using sound boxes and counters. Stretch the sounds in the word. Place one counter in each box as you move from sound to sound.

1. Phonemic Awareness

5 MIN

Oral Blending Tell children they will be blending, or putting together, sounds to make words. Say the following sound sequences:

/u/ /s/ /k/ /u/ /t/ /h/ /u/ /m/ /l/ /u/ k/
/t/ /u/ /n/ /h/ /u/ /g/ /h/ /u/ /g/ /z/

Ask children to blend the sounds together to make a word. Provide corrective feedback by modeling how to stretch together (or sing) the sounds. Introduce the **short u** sound-spelling in *Learn and Blend*.

*From Phonics to Reading
Level A, Teacher's Edition*

The two best predictors of early reading success are phonemic awareness and alphabet recognition (Adams, 1990; Beck and Juel, 1995; Chall, 1996; Stanovich, 1992). These skills open the gate for reading. Without a deep knowledge of the English letters and an awareness that words are made up of sounds, students cannot learn to read.

Phonemic awareness is the understanding that words are made up of a series of discrete sounds, called phonemes. A range of subskills is taught to develop phonemic awareness with **oral blending** and **oral segmentation** having the most positive impact on reading and writing development. These skills are known as the power skills (Blevins 2017; Reutzel, 2015) and are the emphasis of instruction.

Alphabet recognition involves learning the names, shapes, and sounds of the letters of the alphabet with fluency (Bear, Templeton, Invernizzi, and Johnston, 1996). Phonemic awareness and alphabet recognition are focused on primarily in Kindergarten and Grade 1.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Grade K, Level K		Grade 2, Level B		Grade 3, Level C		
Main Skill	Word Study or Fluency Focus	Phonemic Awareness	Main Skill	Word Study	Main Skill	Word Study
M	Alphabet Recognition	• Recognize Rhyme • Clip and Count Syllables • Blend Syllables • Identify Words in a Spoken Sentence	Short Vowels	Diffractional Ending -i	Short Vowels	Closed Syllables
Sh	Alphabet Recognition	• Recognize Rhyme • Clip and Count Syllables • Blend Syllables • Identify Words in a Spoken Sentence	Closed Syllables	"Reading Big Words"	Long a	Open Syllables
S	Alphabet Recognition	• Recognize Rhyme • Blend Syllables • Isolate Beginning Sounds • Identify Words in a Spoken Sentence	Short o	Diffractional Ending -i	Short Vowels	Closed Syllables
T	Alphabet Recognition	• Recognize Rhyme • Blend Syllables • Isolate Beginning Sounds • Identify Words in a Spoken Sentence	Short u	Double Final Consonants (B, G, X)	Double Final Consonants (M, L, X)	Open Syllables
P	Alphabet Recognition	• Oral Blending • Clip and Count Syllables • Isolate Beginning and Ending Sounds • Identify Words in a Spoken Sentence	Short e	Phunds (review)	Phunds (review)	Open Syllables
N	Plural Nouns with -s	• Oral Blending • Recognize Rhyme • Isolate Beginning and Ending Sounds	s-Blends	Possesses	s-Blends	Open Syllables
Sh	Inflectional Ending -i	• Oral Blending • Recognize Rhyme • Isolate Beginning and Ending Sounds	i-Blends	First Blends	Contractions	Open Syllables
Cc	Ending -ck	• Oral Blending • Recognize and Produce Rhyme • Isolate Beginning, Middle and Ending Sounds	r-Blends	Contractions	Contractions	Open Syllables
Ff	Distinguish Initial and Final Consonant Sounds	• Oral Blending • Recognize and Produce Rhyme • Isolate Beginning, Middle and Ending Sounds	Diagraphs ch, sh, th	Inflectional Ending -ed	Diagraphs ch, sh, th	Open Syllables
Dd	Distinguish Initial and Final Consonant Sounds	• Oral Blending • Oral Segmentation • Isolate Beginning, Middle and Ending Sounds	Diagraphs ch, sh, wh	Inflectional Ending -ing	Diagraphs ch, sh, wh	Open Syllables
Hh	Inflectional Ending -i	• Oral Blending • Oral Segmentation • Isolate Beginning, Middle and Ending Sounds	Diagraphs ng nk	3-Letter Blends	3-Letter Blends	Open Syllables
Sh	Disguising Initial and Middle Vowel Sounds	• Oral Blending • Recognize and Produce Rhyme • Isolate Beginning, Middle and Ending Sounds	Final e (ou, u, ue, u_e)	Soft c and g	Soft c and g	Open Syllables
Rr	Ending -ck	• Oral Blending • Oral Segmentation • Isolate Beginning, Middle and Ending Sounds	Final e (ou, u, ue, u_e)	Inflectional Ending -ing and -ed	Inflectional Ending -ing and -ed	Open Syllables
Bb	Plural Nouns with -s	• Oral Blending • Recognize and Produce Rhyme • Isolate Beginning, Middle and Ending Sounds	Single Letter Long Vowels (e, i, o)	Phrases (in, on)	Phrases (in, on)	Open Syllables
Ll	Double Final Consonants	• Oral Blending • Recognize and Produce Rhyme • Isolate Beginning, Middle and Ending Sounds	Long e (ea, ee)	Compound Words	Compound Words	Open Syllables
Kk	Ending -ck	• Oral Blending • Recognize and Produce Rhyme • Isolate Beginning, Middle and Ending Sounds	Long o (oa, oo)	Short e Spelled as o	Short e Spelled as o	Open Syllables
Sh	Disguising Initial and Middle Vowel Sounds	• Oral Blending • Recognize and Produce Rhyme • Isolate Beginning, Middle and Ending Sounds	Long u (ou, oo)	Suffixes (-ed, -ing)	Suffixes (-ed, -ing)	Open Syllables
Gg	Inflectional Ending -i	• Oral Blending • Oral Segmentation • Isolate Middle Sounds	Long y (y, igh)	Comparatives and Superlatives (-er, -est)	Comparatives and Superlatives (-er, -est)	Open Syllables
Ww	Plural Nouns with -s	• Oral Blending • Oral Segmentation • Alliteration	Long u (ou, oo)	Compound Words	Compound Words	Open Syllables
Xx	Plural Nouns -es	• Oral Blending • Oral Segmentation • Recognize and Produce Rhyme	n-Controlled ar	Transition to Longer Words	Transition to Longer Words	Open Syllables
Vv	Blends	• Oral Blending • Oral Segmentation • Recognize and Produce Rhyme	n-Controlled er, ir or en, er	Transition to Longer Words	Transition to Longer Words	Open Syllables
Sh	Disguising Initial and Middle Vowel Sounds	• Oral Blending • Oral Segmentation • Recognize and Produce Rhyme	n-Controlled or, ur, ur	Phrases (do, pre-)	Phrases (do, pre-)	Open Syllables
Zz	Plural Nouns with -s	• Oral Blending • Oral Segmentation • Recognize and Produce Rhyme and Alliteration	Short oo and long oo	Suffixes (-y, -ly)	Suffixes (-y, -ly)	Open Syllables
Oo	Inflectional Ending -i	• Oral Blending • Oral Segmentation • Isolate Beginning, Middle and Ending Sounds	Spelling Rule/ (ss, oo)	Compound Words	Compound Words	Open Syllables
Ty	Double Final Consonant	• Oral Blending • Oral Segmentation • Isolate Beginning, Middle and Ending Sounds	Spelling Rule/ (ss, oo)	Transition to Longer Words	Transition to Longer Words	Open Syllables
Zz	Blends	• Oral Blending • Oral Segmentation • Recognize and Produce Rhyme and Alliteration • Phonemic Manipulation: Delete Syllables	Complex Vowel (z) (ss, oo, ck, ck, ck)	Diffractional Endings (review)	Diffractional Endings (review)	Open Syllables
Short Vowels Review	Compare Short and Long Vowel Sounds	• Oral Blending • Phonemic Manipulation: Add Sounds and Syllables • Phonemic Manipulation: Delete Syllables	n-Controlled one, ur, ur	Transition to Longer Words	Transition to Longer Words	Open Syllables
Long Vowels	Compare Short and Long Vowel Sounds	• Oral Blending • Phonemic Manipulation: Add Sounds and Syllables • Phonemic Manipulation: Delete Syllables	Long (ll, ll)	Transition to Longer Words	Transition to Longer Words	Open Syllables
Final e (ou, ue)	Compare Short and Long Vowel Sounds and Spellings	• Oral Blending • Phonemic Manipulation: Add Sounds and Syllables • Phonemic Manipulation: Delete Syllables	Long (ll, ll)	Transition to Longer Words	Transition to Longer Words	Open Syllables
Final e (ou, ue)	Compare Short and Long Vowel Sounds and Spellings	• Oral Blending • Phonemic Manipulation: Add Sounds and Syllables • Phonemic Manipulation: Delete Syllables	Long (ll, ll)	Transition to Longer Words	Transition to Longer Words	Open Syllables

From Phonics to Reading

A strong scope and sequence builds from the simple to the complex in a way that takes advantage of previous learning. The sequence allows for many words to be formed as early as possible and focuses on teaching high-utility skills before less useful sound spellings (Hanna, Hodges, Hanna, and Rudolph, 1966).

The sequence also has built-in review and repetition to ensure mastery over time. While there is no "right" scope and sequence, programs that strive to connect concepts and move through a series of skills in a stair-step way offer the best chance at student success.

The phonics in the *From Phonics to Reading* sequence teaches new skills and concepts in this manner. As with most early reading skills, differentiated support is provided for the scope and sequence to meet the needs of all students.

3 BLENDING

This is the main strategy for teaching students how to sound out words and must be frequently modeled and applied (Resnick and Beck, 1976; Haddock, 1978; Rosenshine and Stevens, 1984). It is simply the stringing together of letter sounds to read a word. It is the focus of early phonics instruction, but still plays a role when transitioning students from reading one-syllable words to multisyllabic words.

Two types of blending exist—

final and successive

—and each plays an important role in phonics instruction.

Introduction

Learn and Blend
Directions: Listen and join in.
u...u...u...
Up goes the umbrella.

Short u
u

Blend It
Directions: Chorally read the words.

INTRODUCE

- up cup pup but cut hut
- cup cut bug bun hug hum
- cap cup pop pup bug bag
- bus dug fun gum jug nut

5. The big red bug hid.

6. The big red bug hid under the rug.

REVIEW

- map led hip rock dot rip
- fell tap fog beg tan lid

CHALLENGE

- truck stuck struck fluff stuff plug

Daily Practice
Directions: Do one activity each day. Then check the box.

- Build Fluency** Read the words each day by yourself and to a partner.
- Mark It** Circle all the words with **short u**.
- Spell It** Have a partner say each word. Write the word. Check your answer.
- Write About It** Use the words to create a story. Draw a box around the words from the list that you used.


Lesson 4 • Short u **51**

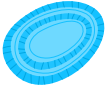
From *Phonics to Reading*
Level A, Student's Edition


4 DICTATION

Dictation

Think and Write
 Directions: Listen to each picture name.
 Write the spelling for each sound in a separate box.

1. 

2. 

3. 

Listen and Spell
 Directions: Write each word and sentence that you hear.

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____ 4. _____

5. _____

Lesson 4 • Short u 55

*From Phonics to Reading
 Level A, Student's Edition*

To best transfer students' growing phonics skills to writing, dictation (which is guided spelling with teacher think-alouds) is critical and begins in Kindergarten.

While not a spelling test, this activity can accelerate students' spelling abilities and understanding of common English spelling patterns and can assist them in using these phonics skills in writing.

Used in combination with word building and structured and unstructured writing experiences in phonics instruction, students have increased opportunities to "try out" their developing skills to express ideas in written form.

5 WORD AWARENESS

Word Sort

Sort It Out
 Directions: Read each word. Then sort the words. Write each word in the correct box.

bat can cat fan fat
 hat man pan ran sat

at an

What did you learn about how words work?

12 Short • Lesson 1

Word Building

Word Ladder
 Directions: Listen to each clue. Then write the word. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.

You see this on top of the letter "L."
 Change one letter.

A flower can be planted in this.
 Change one letter.

You might feel this on a sunny summer day.
 Change one letter.

You can do this on one foot.
 Change one letter.

This is a toy you can spin.

Start → m o p

48 Short • Lesson 3

From Phonics to Reading Level A, Student's Edition

While the introduction to phonics skills is best when explicit and systematic, students also need opportunities to play with words and experiment with how words parts combine in order to solidify and consolidate their understanding of how English words work. Word sorts and word building are key activities to increase students' word awareness (Bear, Templeton, Invernizzi, and Johnston, 2016; Beck and Beck, 2013).

In word building, students are given a set of letter cards and are asked to create a series of words in a specific sequence. This increases their ability to work with letter-sounds flexibly and to fully analyze words for their component sounds and spellings. In word sorts, students look for common spelling patterns, engage in discussions about what they learn about words from this examination, and increase their ability to notice larger chunks in words (an important skill as they transition from one-syllabic to multisyllabic words).

6 HIGH-FREQUENCY WORDS

High-frequency words are the most common words in English. Some are irregular; that is, they do not follow common English sound-spellings. Others are regular and are needed by students during reading before they have the phonics skills to sound them out (Johns, 1980; Adams, 1990; Carroll, Davies, and Richman, 1971; Fry, Kress, and Fountoukidis, 1993; Rinsland, 1945).


The top 250-plus words are taught in Grades K–2. Past Grade 2, when the majority of the key high-frequency words have been introduced, students need to be continually assessed on their mastery of these words, as a lack of fluency can impede comprehension. Some words are more difficult to master (e.g., reversals like *no/on* and *was/saw*, *of/for/from*, and words that begin with *wh-* or *th-*). These words receive more instructional time and assessment in the *From Phonics to Reading* program.

High-Frequency Words

Read-Spell-Write
Directions: Write each word two times. Say each letter as you write it.

- little
- with
- have
- are

Use in Context
Directions: Complete each sentence with a word from above. Read the finished sentences to a partner.



- I hug my _____ pup.
- We _____ fun on the bus.
- What did I do _____ the six cups?
- My cap and bat _____ in the mud.

82 Short u • Lesson 4

Cumulative Review

Build Fluency
Directions: Complete each sentence. Use at least one word with short u.

- This is _____
- I have _____
- The little _____
- Jim and I _____

Directions: Write a sentence using each word pair.

- bus, hot
- cup, mat

Lesson 4 • Short u 81


From Phonics to Reading
Level A, Student's Edition

7 READING CONNECTED TEXT

Read Connected Text

Connected Text
Directions: Read the story. Then answer the questions.

Fun in the Sun
We can have fun in the sun.
Lots of fun!
We can run up to the sea
and jump in.
But too much sun is not good
for our skin.
So after a swim we get our hats
and sit under a big umbrella.



Interact with the Text
Directions: Mark the text.
1. Circle all the words with short *u*.
2. Draw a box around the words that rhyme with *sun*.
Directions: Write about the text.
3. How can we have fun in the sun? Tell a partner. Then write about it.

Lesson 4 • Short u



*From Phonics to Reading
Level A, Student's Edition*

The goal of phonics instruction is to develop students' ability to read connected text independently (Adams, 1990). Controlled, decodable text (also known as accountable text) at the beginning level of reading instruction helps students develop a sense of comfort in and control over their reading growth and should be a key learning tool in early phonics instruction.

The tight connection between what students learn in phonics and what they read is essential for building a faster foundation in early reading (Juel and Roper-Schneider, 1985; Blevins, 2017). This is especially critical when students encounter less-controlled leveled readers during small group lessons. These accountable (phonics-based) texts need to be reread to build fluency, discussed to develop comprehension, and written about to provide opportunities for students to apply their growing phonics skills in writing.

The accountable texts in the *From Phonics to Reading* program were written to be instructive, engaging, and comprehensible—using standard English language sentence patterns and high-utility words to benefit early readers.


PLUS YOU, THE TEACHER

TEACHER TABLE

ENGLISH LEARNERS

Sound Transfer In Cantonese and Mandarin, there is an approximate transfer for **short u**. There is no transfer in Spanish, Hmong, Korean, or Farsi. Focus on articulation. Model correct mouth position. Have children use hand mirrors to focus on mouth position as they pronounce the sound.

Vocabulary Each day, select several words from the Blend It lines on Student Book, page 51. Focus on words whose meanings can be explained or demonstrated in a concrete way. For example, show a picture of a *cup*, *pup*, *hut*, or *jug*. Demonstrate the meaning of *hum*, *hug*, and *cut*.

Note: Children will complete the **Daily Practice** activities on Student Book, page 51 throughout the week. Whenever you see  children will return to previous pages to reinforce their learning.

From Phonics to Reading
Level A, Teacher's Edition

The power and impact of phonics instruction rests on the shoulders of a skilled, informed teacher. For example, a teacher with expertise in linguistics and research-based phonics routines improves the language of instruction in order to avoid student confusion and better assesses students' instructional needs (Moats, 1995).

Differentiated support is often needed for teachers based on their teaching experience or when they move across grade-level bands (K-2, 3-5, 6-8) as each band requires a nuanced understanding of phonics and word study instruction. Point-of-use professional development resources are provided in *From Phonics to Reading*.

CONCLUSION

Ensuring these seven (plus one) characteristics are in place is a critical first step in developing a phonics instructional strand that will meet the needs of early readers. The *From Phonics to Reading* program contains these characteristics through instruction that is active, engaging, and thought-provoking—the kind of instruction that creates active word learners on the path to becoming successful independent readers who love reading.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Wiley Blevins is the author of Sadlier's new ***From Phonics to Reading*** for Grades K–3.

This program is a comprehensive foundational skills program that incorporates *Seven Key Characteristics of Strong Phonics Instruction*.

Embedded professional development along with a critical review and repetition cycle make early reading mastery possible for every student.

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Wiley Blevins has taught elementary school in both the United States and South America. A graduate of Harvard Graduate School of Education, he has written over 15 books for teachers (including *Phonics from A to Z*, *A Fresh Look at Phonics*, *Building Fluency*, and *Teaching Nonfiction*), authored elementary reading programs, conducted research on topics ranging from fluency to using decodable text, and regularly trains teachers throughout the United States and Asia.

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