

# Michigan's Adult Literacy Project



## Reading Resources, Part 1

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## The Components of Reading

What is reading? According to the definition used by the Partnership for Reading, the National Reading Panel, and the federal Reading First law, reading is a “complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires:

- an understanding of how speech sounds are related to print;
- decoding (word identification) skills;
- fluency;
- vocabulary and background knowledge;
- active comprehension strategies; and
- a motivation to read.”

Learning to read is a sequential process. Because you can read effortlessly, it is easy to forget that reading is a skill that is made possible by several sub-skills or components that work together. Each new skill builds on the mastery of previously learned skills. Each step in the process relates to one of the basic components of reading. Reading components are interrelated abilities that make up skilled reading.

There are many ways to divide the different components of reading. The National Institute for Literacy uses the following components:

- Phonemic awareness
- Word analysis - phonics
- Word recognition - sight words
- Reading rate
- Fluency
- Spelling
- Background knowledge
- Word meaning
- Comprehension

Other research documents divide reading components as follows:

- Print Skills (Alphabetsics)
  - Word Recognition
  - Rate and Fluency
- Meaning Skills
  - Word Meaning (Vocabulary)

- Background Knowledge
- Silent Reading Comprehension<sup>1</sup>  
Regardless of how the subskills are divided, it is important to understand the basics of each component in order to better serve adult readers.

## Print Skills (Alphabets)

English is an alphabetic language and phonemes are the building blocks of language. A phoneme is simply the smallest unit of sound in a word. Represented by letters of the alphabet, they are the basic sounds of spoken words. For example, in the word “bat”, there are three phonemes or sounds that make up the word: /b/a/t/. In the word “boat”, most people automatically hear three individual sounds: buh, oh, and tuh. So phonemic awareness is the knowledge that words are made up of a combination of individual sounds and that when those sounds are combined, they make up a word. Therefore, reading requires that a student decodes or recognizes these phonemes as words (phonics). At the early stages of literacy, many adult education students often use so much of their cognitive space decoding words that they have very little left for comprehension.

For some adult students, it will be necessary to begin their reading development at the phonemic awareness stage. These are the students who may not have the skills to understand that individual sounds, when blended together, create words. This is truly the beginning stage of the reading process.

There is not a depth of research to support how to teach phonemes to the adult learner. According to the research by Kruidenier (October 2002)<sup>2</sup>, no major principles or trends related to phonic awareness instruction for adults can be drawn from the current research. However, he does state that from the current studies, it is suggested that phonemic awareness be taught to adults using direct instruction, such as simple demonstration and corrective feedback. What this means in the classroom is that oral and written phonemic awareness exercises should be used with students. These exercises should include segmenting words into phonemes, blending phonemes, and adding, deleting, substituting, and shifting phonemes.

## Word Recognition: Word Analysis

Word analysis or phonics is the relationship between a specific letter and its sounds as it relates to the written word. For example, if a student comes across an unfamiliar word, he/she may try to read the word by breaking apart the different letters. For example, the word smart. The

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<sup>1</sup> The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/>.

<sup>2</sup> Kruidenier, J. Ed. D. (2002) Research-based principles for adult basic education reading instruction. National Institute for Literacy. Produced by RMC Research Corporation, Portsmouth: NH. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: <http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/publications.html>

student can try to read the word by separating the word into sounds with which he/she is familiar: /s/m/a/r/t/. Phonics is also an important part of the writing process as students learn to spell specific words. Students with good phonological awareness are generally able to use rhyme, beginning and ending sounds, and specific phonemes to read and write words.

Is phonics necessary for good reading comprehension? Research supports that those students who can identify the relationship between the sounds of the English language and the letters, have an easier time in identifying words fluently, thus, leading to better comprehension. However, phonics does have limitations due to the complexity of the English language.

Phonics may be taught systematically through directly teaching consonants, short and long vowels, two-letter graphemes (oi, ea, ou, sh, ch), and the common blends that consist of more than one grapheme (st, sm, bl, pr). Direct teaching would mean that students would practice using their knowledge of sounds when reading word lists and text materials.

According to the National Reading Panel (2000),<sup>3</sup> there are several different types of systematic phonics programs:

- Synthetic phonics programs that teach students to convert letters into sounds and then blend the sounds into words.
- Analytic phonics programs that teach students to analyze letter-sound relationships once the word is identified.
- Phonics-through-spelling where students are taught to transform sounds into letters to writing words.
- Phonics in context where context clues are used in addition to sounding out words in order to identify the word.
- Analogy phonics programs where students learn to use the parts of words that they already know in order to identify new words (prefixes, suffixes, root words).

Although each type of program has strengths, most individuals learn best when taught different ways to decode words – from sounding out graphemes to viewing the word in the context in which it is read. A good reading program should provide students with different skills in the phonics area, as well as using sight words and whole language approaches to increase word recognition skills.

## Word Recognition: Sight Words

In order to be a fluent reader, you need to be able to instantly recognize and read words. Think about when you read. You don't have to "sound out" each word; you know most of them by sight. Adult students need to acquire this same comfort level with words. They need to have a

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<sup>3</sup> National Reading Panel. (2002). Findings and determinations of the National Reading Panel by topic areas. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: [www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/findings.htm](http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/findings.htm).

large “sight word” vocabulary. Sight words are those words that students should be able to read automatically.

When teaching sight words, start with the words that appear most often in reading passages. Two common lists for sight words are the Dolch List and Fry List. If your students have instant recognition of the words on these lists, their reading skills will be greatly enhanced. Other types of sight words include such things as direction or signal words and those words that are part of a specific subject area.

Research supports five ways to read words, including:

- Decoding
- Analogizing to already known words
- Identifying and pronouncing spelling patterns
  - Guessing from context
  - Directly by sight

When teaching sight words, it is important to use as many modalities as possible. Have students make flash cards, say the word aloud while looking, tracing, or visualizing, create their own personal dictionaries, play games – the list is endless.

### **Words Students Should Know**

The following are brief descriptions of five word lists that you may use in the classroom. These words represent the more than 3,000 words that adults need to know to be able read and understand automatically. These are the words that are most frequently used in the English language and make up approximately 90% of the text that adults read.

#### ***Dolch Word List***

The list of 220 words, prepared by E.W. Dolch, makes up from 50 to 75 percent of all ordinary reading matter excluding proper names. These words may also be referred to as ‘common words’, or ‘common core vocabulary’ or, more usually these days, ‘high frequency words’ and ‘medium frequency words. Most beginning reading texts use the Dolch Word list as a basis for the words that are used. You can access this list by doing a search on “Dolch Words” or by accessing one of the following sites:

The Dolch Kit: A free kit of the Dolch words and lots of games that can be used in the classroom. Located on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.theschoolbell.com/Links/Dolch/Dolch.html>

Dolch Word List: The 220 words in a pdf file from the National Institute for Literacy. Located on the World Wide Web at: [http://www.nifl.gov/readingprofiles/Dolch\\_Basic.pdf](http://www.nifl.gov/readingprofiles/Dolch_Basic.pdf)

### ***Fry Word List***

Edward B. Fry, Professor Emeritus of Rutgers University, compiled a list of the most common words in English called The Instant Words (Fry List). The purpose of the list is to help in the improvement of reading instruction. The first one hundred words make up half of all written material. The first three hundred words comprise 65 percent of all written material. You can access this list by doing a search on “The Instant Word List” or the “Fry List” or by accessing one of the following sites:

The Instant Words (in a pdf file from the National Institute for Literacy)

Located on the World Wide Web at: [http://www.nifl.gov/readingprofiles/Instant\\_Words.pdf](http://www.nifl.gov/readingprofiles/Instant_Words.pdf)

Fry List (The first 300 words)

Located on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.usu.edu/teachall/text/reading/Frylist.pdf>

### ***General Service List***

The General Service List (GSL) (West, 1953) is a set of 2,000 words selected to be of the greatest "general service" to learners of English. They are not the most common 2,000 words, though frequency was one of the factors taken into account in making the selection. As published, the GSL is a medium-sized red book, organized like a dictionary. Each of the 2,000 headwords is listed alphabetically with brief definitions and example sentences. A number is given for each word, representing the number of occurrences per 5 million words. A percentage number is given for each meaning, representing the frequency of that meaning in the occurrences of the word. Headwords are listed in uppercase bold type. Derived forms are listed under the headwords in lowercase bold type and are (usually) given their own frequency numbers.

### ***Signal Words***

Signal words tell what the writer wants the reader to think about. These words enable the reader to determine what type of strategies to employ in order to better the material that is being read. Understanding signal words is a key to comprehension. Signal words are synonymous with transition words and relationship words. They guide the reader from one thought to another. They also assist the writer in organizing and presenting information clearly.

### ***Academic Word List***

The Academic Word List was created by Dr. Averil Coxhead at the Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. Dr. Coxhead created a list of 3.5 million words found in over 400 written academic texts. She used a range of different types of texts, journal articles, and articles from the World Wide Web, covering 28 different subject areas from the basic disciplines. She then counted how frequently and how widely different words were used and selected the core

academic vocabulary. Dr. Coxhead included on the list only the words which appeared at least 100 times as a whole and at least ten times in each of the disciplines.

As a result, the 570 words on the Academic Word List are valuable for adult education students regardless of their academic preparation or their career choice. The words are divided into ten sublists according to frequency. Sublist 1 has the most frequently used words.

## Fluency and Rate

Think about how you read different types of texts or reading materials. You read differently depending on what you wish to achieve from reading the selected text. How quickly you read is your reading rate. Good fluency and reading rate are important because when a person reads fluently, he/she does not have to worry about the tedious process of decoding each word along the way.

Sometimes, students can accurately pronounce words, but they are laboriously slow readers. Decoding becomes a natural part of the reading process. They expend so much energy trying to identify individual words that they lose the flow of the text and often have problems remembering what they have read in order to make sense of the passage. Fast and accurate decoding are two elements of fluent reading or reading rate. How do you get your students to improve their reading rate?

First, remember that reading rate is how quickly you read with understanding. Reading fluency refers to both the speed and ease with which one reads.

Fluency, the ability to read with accuracy, speed and expression, is important, because it allows the reader to break free from the tedious process of decoding each word along the way. When fluent readers read silently, they recognize words automatically and can group words quickly to help gain meaning from what is being read. When reading aloud, the fluent reader reads effortlessly and with expression. Fluency is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. When students are fluent readers, they don't have to concentrate on decoding words, but can rather focus on comprehending the text. Remember, that reading rate is the ability to read something quickly, whereas fluency is the ability to read not only with speed, but also with accuracy and expression in order to better understand the text.

There are three elements that compose fluent reading:

- Rate (fast decoding)
- Accuracy
- Reading with proper rhythm, intonation, and expression (prosody)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts College of Education. Essential reading strategies for the struggling reader: Activities for an accelerated reading program. The University of Texas at Austin. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: [http://www.texasreading.org/utclra/materials/essential\\_reading.asp](http://www.texasreading.org/utclra/materials/essential_reading.asp).

Fluency develops gradually over time and through substantial practice. At the earliest stage of reading development, a student's oral reading is slow and labored because the student is just learning to "break the code" - to attach sounds to letters and to blend letter sounds into recognizable words. Fluency, however, is not a stage of development at which readers can read all words quickly and easily. Fluency changes, depending on what readers are reading, their familiarity with the words, and the amount of their practice with reading text.

Fluency may be taught using many different types of approaches. Torgesen (2003), in his article *What Science Has Taught Us about the Skills Needed to be a Good Reader*,<sup>5</sup> discusses that repeated reading, or the simple strategy of reading and reading again short passages several times, each time attempting to read a little faster, is one of the most effective ways of improving fluency. Not surprisingly, some researchers have discovered that silent reading alone will not reveal students' needs. Being asked to read aloud, however, calls on a different set of skills, and may not aid in building comprehension in and of itself, if it is an intimidating task for a student.

Finding a balance of activities (e.g. explicit instruction, guided reading, echoing the teacher's reading, reading in pairs, and silent reading) every day within a safe and non-threatening environment is most likely to produce more positive results.

### **Determining Reading Rate**

A student's reading rate may be calculated by dividing the number of words read correctly by the total amount of reading time. You may count out 100 words in a passage and then time the student as he or she reads the passage. If a student reads 92 words correctly in 1.5 minutes, the student has a reading rate of 61 words per minute (wpm). A standard word is six letter spaces including punctuation and spacing.

To improve student's reading rate use timed readings. Provide students with reading materials that are one grade level below his/her assessed reading skill level. You may either have students complete timed readings as a group or individually. If you have students complete readings individually, you may wish to invest in some basic kitchen timers so that they can easily time themselves.

How do you get started? Select reading texts with comprehension questions. You may wish to choose your own texts or use a commercial series. You may have students read for a three or five minute timing and figure out their words per minute or you may wish to have them complete the article assigned for the timed reading and figure out how many words per minute they read based on the total number of words divided the total number of minutes needed to read the article. A few select comprehension questions are important to check that students are not merely reading words, but are rather reading for meaning. Have students chart their words per minute on a chart similar to the one on the next page. To be most useful, timed readings should occur on a daily basis. Practice makes perfect!

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<sup>5</sup> Torgesen, J. K. (2003). What science has taught us about the skills needed to be a good reader. *Practitioners Points*. Vol. 3 (2).

## Average Rates for Reading with Understanding

<b>Grade Equivalent</b>	<b>Standard Words Per Minute</b>
2.5	121
3.5	135
4.5	149
5.5	163
6.5	177
7.5	191
8.5	205
9.5	219
10.5	233
11.5	247
12.5	261

Source: Carver (1990)

## Strategy – Letter and Word Discrimination

This activity helps the student learn to discriminate between easily-confused words or letters and helps students retain the words or letters.

### Materials

- Handout: [Discrimination Grid](#).
- Two words or letters your student confuses or has difficulty telling apart.

### Suggestions

- Print the chosen words or letters, one in each of the left and right boxes at the bottom of the [Discrimination Grid](#). Fill out the rest of the grid with the two words in random order, with different capitalization patterns, some block printed, some cursive writing, etc.
- Have your student place his or her left index finger on the left bottom square and right index finger on the right bottom square.
- Pronounce each word in turn and have the student repeat it. The idea is to associate each word with either the right or left hand finger.
- Now ask your student to "touch-read" the entire chart. Move the appropriate finger to touch each word as it is read, then return the finger to its bottom square.
- Repeat until the student can read the chart fluently. Review and repeat the chart as often as necessary.
- Keep a list of words or letters your student frequently confuses as he/she reads to make additional charts.
- Optional: time the student and record the time. Have the student repeat this activity and try to improve on speed.

An example is provided on the next page with a template on the following page.

Example:

Has	had	Has
HAD	Had	has
has	has	Had
had	HAS	Had
has	had	Has
Left finger home <b>had</b>		Right finger home <b>has</b>

**Word Discrimination Grid**


Left Finger

Home

Right Finger

Home

## Strategy – Neurological Impress Method

Reading to or along with the student for a short time is a way to build sight word vocabulary, increase fluency and model good reading. This simple but very effective procedure exposes the student to many more words than if a student read at his or her own pace.

### Benefits

- Develops reading fluency
- Helps impress the words into the learner's memory
- Helps learners imitate correct pronunciation, intonation, and phrasing
- Increases confidence in reading
- Models reading fluency and mechanics
- Provides a pleasant, non-threatening reading experience
- Provides immediate feedback and success in reading

### Guidelines

- For best results, do this activity daily over a period of several months.
- Be aware of cultural considerations in a close working relationship such as this requires.
- Try this procedure in non-formal settings where literate people might teach other family members or friends.
- Use texts with words the learner can already read. Begin with lower level of difficulty texts and move to texts written at a level slightly above that which the student can read comfortably.

### Steps of the Neurological Impress Method

- Sit the student slightly in front of you, so you can point to the material the student is reading and can speak directly into the student's ear. (*Tip: Determine which hand the learner writes and eats with and sit on that side of the learner.*)
- Begin reading material that is easy. Choose a text passage at your student's approximate reading level or slightly higher. It can be interest-based or selected as being effective in building sight vocabulary. As you continue to work with the student, you can increase the level of difficulty of the material. This is important as many teachers spend too much time using materials written at a low level of difficulty.
- Tell the students that you are going to read the material and that he/she is to read along with you as you point to the words. Jointly hold the book between you.
- Read aloud together with the student. Begin to read at a slightly slower pace than normal rate for you. While reading, be sure to point to each word as it is read. This part of the procedure is extremely important.
- Read a little faster and louder than the student. At first, the student may complain that he/she is unable to keep up with you. This should not, however, keep you from using the procedure.
- Track the words smoothly with a finger as you read. This allows the learner to hear the word just before saying it and to imitate the intonation and flow of the language.
- Occasionally lower the volume of your voice to allow the learner to lead the reading.
- Help the learner gradually take over tracking by guiding his/her hand smoothly under the words.
- As you work with the student, you are likely to notice a sharp improvement in the student's ability to read. Begin to increase your rate of reading as the student's reading improves.

- Read for periods of 5 to 15 minutes two to four times per day. This is not always practical for the adult education classroom; however, even twice a week for 5 minutes shows improvement in a student's fluency and rate.
-