

PHONICS

At a Glance

What is phonics?

Phonics is knowledge of the predictable correspondences between phonemes and graphemes (the letters or letter combinations representing sounds) and correspondences between larger blocks of letters and syllables or meaningful word parts (morphemes). Phonics instruction is a necessary component of learning to read and write. The ability to accurately and automatically decode regularly and irregularly spelled words is best accomplished through sequential, systematic and explicit instruction in letter-sound relationships. Phonics instruction should include multiple opportunities for students to practice explicitly taught skills in decodable text and in isolation, such as reading word lists and oral dictation. Phonics instruction makes a significant impact on students' reading ability when taught in kindergarten and grade 1. More complex phonics skills should continue to be taught through grade 3 and beyond. Strong phonics skills allow students to spend more time thinking about what the words are telling them (their meaning) rather than figuring out what the words on the page say. For a reading curriculum to be comprehensive, it must include phonics instruction.

Recommendations for the Classroom

- Teach phonics explicitly, systematically and sequentially.
- Explicitly teach the grade-appropriate sound-spelling patterns of the 44 phonemes and corresponding graphemes.
- Provide various purposeful writing opportunities (dictation, responding to text, student-generated writing).
- Provide opportunities for blending sounds and segmenting words.
- Provide opportunities to decode words in isolation and in context.
- Assess progress and provide corrective feedback immediately.
- Teach phonics skills until students obtain mastery.
- Consider a variety of student-grouping patterns, including a multi-tiered system of supports to meet the needs of all students: Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3.

Evidence of these instructional practices should be present in High-Quality Instructional Resources (HQIRs). When gaps are identified, supplement to ensure all recommendations are carried out.

Alignment to the Kentucky Academic Standards for Reading and Writing

Phonics is a part of the K-5 *Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS) for Reading and Writing (RW)*. While direct alignment is evident in the Reading Foundational Skills (RF) and Language (L) standards, phonics skills directly support other strands of the KAS for RW. For instance, strong phonics skills lead to fluency, the ability to read with accuracy, speed and prosody (RF.4), which supports comprehension. Acquiring these foundational skills provides access to complex texts. This consequently builds background knowledge and vocabulary, increasing students' abilities to master the standards for Reading Literature (RL), Reading Informational Text (RI) and Composition (C). Further, as students begin composing writing pieces, they must connect their knowledge of letter-sound correspondences with letter formation (RF.3, L.2 and H.1). Phonics instruction develops skills necessary for students to understand and create text.

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