CHAPTER

3

Alphabetic Principle

Key Terms

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<th>Term</th>
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<tr>
<td>Automatic word recognition</td>
<td>Irregular words, also called sight words</td>
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<td>Consonant Blends</td>
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<td>CVC variants</td>
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Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

1. Identify and describe the sequence of skills needed for students to attain the alphabetic principle.
2. Adapt letter–sound and word reading lessons in general education reading curricula for students who are at risk or who have disabilities.
3. Use assessment data to identify students who are at risk of not attaining the alphabetic principle, diagnose specific letter–sound and word-reading difficulties, and monitor student progress in beginning word reading.
4. Implement strategies for teaching letter sounds and beginning word reading that maximize the probability of students attaining the alphabetic principle.
5. Implement strategies to provide extra help for students for whom the regular classroom reading time is not sufficient.
6. Identify and describe the beginning letter–sound and word-reading components of five commonly used intensive reading programs.
7. Identify and describe ways to help older students attain the alphabetic principle.
8. Explain how beginning letter–sound and word reading instruction can be adapted for English language learners.
What Skills Do I Need to Teach?

Chapter 2 emphasized the importance of assessing and systematically teaching phonemic awareness to students who are at risk, explaining how an understanding of the sound system of spoken language relates to reading. Although this knowledge of our system of spoken language is essential, phonemic awareness is only one component needed for developing accurate and fluent reading. An effective reading program for students who are at risk must also help them attain alphabetic principle, another key component that comprises the focus for this chapter. Alphabetic principle is “the understanding that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 12). Students who have alphabetic principle have moved from the earliest stage of reading where they first must sound out individual phonemes before blending them into a word (/k/ + /a/ + /t/ = cat) to a more efficient stage where they automatically read words as whole words (cat). These students decipher new and familiar regular words accurately and automatically. They also acquire and remember sight words more readily. “In short, knowledge of the alphabetic principle contributes greatly to children’s ability to read words both in isolation and connected text” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 12). Most importantly, the fluent decoding that results when readers have developed alphabetic principle enables them to focus more thought on the meaning of the text they are reading.

The purpose of phonics instruction is to establish the alphabetic principle by teaching students the relationship between written letters or graphemes and the 41 to 44 sounds of spoken language or phonemes. Educators who minimize the role of phonics in teaching reading argue that the English language does not incorporate a one-to-one relationship between the 41 to 44 sounds and 26 letter symbols. For example, sometimes the sound of /e/ as in red, also appears as ea as in bread. The sound /a/ can be written ay as in may, a_e as in made or ai as in maid. These critics ignore the large proportion of regularity in English that justifies the teaching of phonics and is supported by an extensive research literature validating its effectiveness, particularly with children who are at risk or who have disabilities.

The foundation of our book is based on a systematic and explicit phonics approach called synthetic phonics, in which student success and independence is emphasized through the use of carefully supported teaching strategies and curriculum. A teacher using a synthetic phonics approach first teaches the most common letter–sound associations in isolation using a logical, success-oriented sequence. With carefully supported teacher instruction, students learn to apply their phonemic awareness skills and knowledge of letter–sound correspondences to sounding out words in lists and sentences as well as spelling from dictation. The teacher provides substantial practice so students apply their decoding skills to reading and writing. Beginning reading books and written assignments are carefully coordinated with those skills.

Synthetic phonics is not the only explicit and systematic way of teaching phonics. Other systematic and explicit phonics programs include analytic phonics, analogy phonics, and phonics through spelling. Analytic phonics emphasizes first teaching the whole word before analyzing letter–sound relationships. In this approach, students learn letter–sound relationships using words they already know. Letter sounds are not introduced in isolation. Analogy-based phonics emphasizes using known word family patterns to identify unknown words. Phonics through spelling emphasizes phonetic spelling as the foundation for word reading. In this approach, students learn to break apart words into phonemes and to spell words by translating the phonemes into letters. Although the many varied systematic and explicit phonics programs are primarily based on one of these categories, realistically most of the programs incorporate strategies from some or all of these approaches. In this book,
when we describe how to effectively teach synthetic phonics, we also include recommendations that come from the phonics through spelling approach, analytic phonics approach, and analogy phonics approach.

The systematic and explicit phonics approach described in this text follows a logical sequence of skills needed to read regular words accurately and fluently. The first words taught contain the most common sounds of individual letters. Once the student can decode some basic consonant–vowel–consonant (CVC) words, a relatively small number of irregular or sight words are introduced. A list of skills in a typical systematic phonics program is shown in Figure 3.1 and described in the following section. Note the first group of words are likely to appear in beginning phonics programs prior to students attaining the alphabetic principle. Students at this level are reading at the individual letter-sound level with a focus on the most common letter sounds including the short vowels. The second group of words mainly appears after students have reached alphabetic principle and are beginning to decode clusters as opposed to individual sounds.

Sequence for Teaching Alphabetic Principle

Identify the Most Common Sounds of Individual Letters in Isolation  All systematic phonics programs identify a planned sequence for teaching letter–sound correspondences. The most common letter sounds are stressed because they lend more predictability to the beginning reading process and also lead to the eventual identification of more words. A list of the most common letter sounds was shown in Table 1.4. Note that teaching the sounds of letters is recommended before teaching letter names. Students who are at risk are more likely to come to school unable to identify the letters of the alphabet by name. Since these students may have difficulty learning the letter names and sounds at the same time, letter sounds should be taught first because they lead more directly to reading words. Systematic and explicit phonics programs are designed to start instruction in word reading as soon as student success is assured.

An often neglected key to teaching phonics effectively is the careful pronunciation of letter sounds. In the approach to sounds recommended here, great care is taken when teaching students to pronounce consonants without adding an uh or schwa sound to each. For example, the sound for the letter t is pronounced /t/, rather than /tuh/; the sound for d is pronounced /d/, not /duh/, the sound for p is pronounced /p/, not /puh/. Saying the consonants without adding schwa sounds makes the blending of sounds into words easier. If Corvon has been taught letter sounds with sloppy schwa endings, he may logically sound out the word bat as /buh/ + /a/ + /tuh/ or buhatuh. In order to read this word correctly, Corvon must add an extra step and delete the two /u/ sounds contained within the blended word. Teaching letter sounds correctly from the beginning eliminates this problem.

Each systematic phonics program presents its own rationale for the sequence of letter sounds that are introduced. Although the National Panel Report (2000) didn’t address the issue, the order in which the letter sounds are taught can influence how quickly students acquire them during instruction (Carnine et al., 2004). Bridging the Gap beginning on page 72 summarizes the rationale behind the order in which letter sounds are taught in two systematic phonics programs.

Read CVC Words  Orally sound out lists of single-syllable words that contain letter sounds previously taught. When they sound out, students say each sound in succession, moving from left to right. Students then blend the sounds together to quickly say a word. The first words students read are often referred to as short vowel words or consonant–vowel–consonant (CVC) words, such as mat or sit. Words beginning with stop sounds (t, d, b) are more difficult to read than those beginning with continuous sounds (m, s, f). Words with stop sounds in the middle are also more difficult. CVC words are regular words, meaning that they can be sounded out.
Read CVC-variant Words  Orally sound out and read lists of single-syllable CVC-variant words that contain blends of letter sounds previously taught. Single-syllable words that begin or end with consonant blends are more difficult to read than regular CVC words. Consonant blends are two or more successive consonants sounded out in sequence without losing their identity. Examples of consonant blends include st as in stop, nd as in sand, and st and nd as in stand. CVC words containing blends are described by their consonant–vowel pattern and termed CVC-variant words. Stop is a CCVC word, sand is a CVCC word, and stand is a CCVCC word.

Pre-Alphabetic Principle*  

1. CVC words beginning with a continuous sound: 
   mad, mop, red, rig, sun
2. CVC words beginning with a stop sound: 
   bad, did, gun, hot, jet
3. CVCC words ending with a consonant blend or double consonants: 
   band, pond, jump, miss, kept
4. CCVC words beginning with a consonant blend: 
   clam, frog, glad, skin, step
5. CCVCC, CCCVC, and CCCVCC words beginning and/or ending with a consonant blend: 
   blink, glass, slump, split, struck

Post-Alphabetic Principle

1. VCe (silent e) pattern words in which the vowel is long (VCV rule)  
   - Words beginning with a single consonant (CVCe): 
     hope, cute, Pete, mile, tape
   - Words beginning with a consonant blend (CCVCe): 
     skate, spoke, froze, bride, stripe
   - Multisyllable words with a VCe syllable: 
     hopeless, excuse, likely, stamped, grateful
2. Letter combinations: 
   rain, harm, green, cloud, shed
3. Suffixes: 
   missed, cheerful, middle, action, grumpy
4. Prefixes: 
   amount, conduct, mislead, protest, translate, undergo
5. CVCe derivative words: 
   - Words with s endings: 
     bites, cubes, mopes, planes, times
   - Words with er endings: 
     later, smoker, user, braver, timer
   - Words with ed endings: 
     hoped, named, smiled, smoked, glided
   - Words with ing endings (VCV rule): 
     naming, riding, closing, shading, biting
   - Words with y endings: 
     garry, spicy, bony, shiny, wavy
   - Words with est endings: 
     cutest, latest, widest, safest
6. Y-derivative words: 
   foggie (foggy), funnier (funny), parties (party), babied (baby)

* Pre-alphabetic words can be used as oral examples in phonemic awareness activities.

FIGURE 3.1 Phonics Word Types Pre- and Post-Alphabetic Stages
Rationales for Introducing Letter Sounds in Two Systematic Phonics Programs

The order in which letter sounds are introduced can have a big impact on how easily the letters are learned. Described below are two different strategies for sequencing letter sounds used in reading programs shown to be successful with students who have great difficulty learning to read: Reading Mastery and Lindamood®: LiPS. Even if you don’t use these programs, the rules they use for sequencing letters can be applied to adapt other programs, or, at least, give you clues to where your students might experience difficulty. As you read the descriptions of the way that letter sounds are introduced in the two programs, determine the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Rationale 1: Direct Instruction
Reduce confusion when learning letters with similar sounds or appearance.
Letters that have a similar sound or are similar in appearance should be separated by at least three letters from each other. Letters that have both a similar sound and appearance should be separated by at least six letters. Carnine and colleagues (2004) further suggest that all the vowels be separated by at least three letters, and that /i/ and /e/ be separated by six letters. Table 3.1 lists specific letters that students are likely to confuse and are in need of separating when teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letters with similar sound</th>
<th>Letters with similar appearance</th>
<th>Letters with similar sound and appearance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b and d</td>
<td>b and d</td>
<td>b and d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b and p</td>
<td>b and p</td>
<td>m and n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m and n</td>
<td>m and n</td>
<td>b and p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t and e</td>
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<td>k and g</td>
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<td>t and d</td>
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<td>o and u</td>
<td>n and r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f and v</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Move into story reading earlier by teaching high-frequency letter sounds
Introduce more-useful letter sounds (consonant sounds such as /m/, /n/, /s/, /t/, all of the vowel sounds) before less-useful letter sounds (/x/, /z/, /q/).

Teach lower-case letters before upper-case letters
Most upper-case letters are not identical to their lower-case counterparts, and learning both at the same time can place an undue burden on a student who is at risk. Since beginning reading passages contain mostly lower-case letters, these are the letters that should be taught first.

Rationale 2: Lindamood®: LiPS
Choose Your Approach
Depending on the needs of the students, teachers can opt for Path 1, in which all of the consonant sounds are taught before the vowel sounds. These sounds are then applied to manipulating phonemes, spelling, and reading. Path 1 is typically used for older students. On Path 2, three
consonant pairs or a total of six sounds and three vowel sounds are taught and then used in manipulating phonemes, spelling, and reading. When students have success applying those letters to reading and spelling, the other consonants and vowels are taught. Path 2 is more appropriate for younger children and remedial students who have experienced consistent failure (Lindamood & Lindamood, 1998).

**Teach the Brothers**
Teach consonant pairs called *brothers*. Each consonant pair represents a voiced and unvoiced consonant formed with the same mouth movements. Examples of consonant pairs are:

- /p/ and /b/
- /t/ and /d/
- /k/ and /g/

**Teach the Cousins**
After students know the brothers, teach the groups of consonants called *the cousins*. Nose sounds (/m/, /n/, /ng/), wind sounds (/w/, /wh/, /h/), and lifters (/l/, /r/) fall under this category.

**Teach the Borrowers**
Next teach the last group of consonants, called the *borrowers* because they borrow the sounds of other letters (/c/, /h/, /qu/, /y/).

**Teach the Vowel Circle**
Fifteen long and short vowels are categorized into four distinct groups according to the way they are formed by the mouth and tongue. Students discover where the vowel sounds are articulated, using sensory information to organize them into the following categories: round, smile, sliders, and open. Students learn to organize the vowels into a linguistic vowel circle depicted in Figure 3.2, organized by tongue placement and shape of the mouth for each vowel.

**FIGURE 3.2 Vowel Circle Map**
Read Single Syllable Words Containing Letter Combinations  Sometimes students are introduced to more complex phonic patterns before they have attained the alphabetic principle. These phonic patterns include combinations of letters called:

- **digraphs**: two successive letters articulated as a single phoneme. Examples of digraphs include *ch* as in *chop*, *th* as in *this*, and *oo* as in *book*.
- **diphthongs**: vowel blends in which the first sound appears to glide into the second sound. Examples of diphthongs include *ou* as in *mouse* and *oi* as in *boil*.

Read a Small Number of High-Frequency Sight Words Needed to Read Passages  By teaching students a limited number of high-frequency or common sight words required for reading beginning text (for example, *a*, *the*, *I*, *is*, and *to*), teachers can focus student attention on critical sounding-out strategies.

Sound Out Previously Taught One-Syllable Words in Sentences and Passages  Include CVC words, CVC variants, and words containing letter combinations. Books in which at least 70% of the text is comprised of words that can be sounded out mixed in with a relatively small proportion of previously taught high-frequency sight words are called decodable books. Passage reading differs from reading lists of individual words in that students are reading connected text, scanning each word from left to right, moving from word to word, learning how punctuation marks affect meaning, and answering comprehension questions. In passage reading, students are required to sound out words by independently moving their fingers from letter to letter as they sound out the words. Requiring students to move from letter to letter while pointing to each letter reinforces left-to-right reading and keeps the reader focused on each letter in the words.

Read One-Syllable Words and Passages the Fast Way  When students have ample opportunities to read word lists and text coordinated with letter sounds they have learned, they begin subvocal sounding out by silently moving their lips or silently reading the sounds before blending. Since some students will not make this leap on their own, teachers of students who are at risk will be more effective if they explicitly teach subvocal sounding out and provide practice for their students to use the new strategy. Begin by having your students read words the fast way by first sounding out words subvocally, without making an audible sound, and then reading the words out loud. Students then learn to read words the fast way in lists followed by passages or connected text. Students who begin to use subvocal sounding-out are close to reaching fully developed alphabetic principle. Gradually, with more practice they will automatic word recognition.

Build on Previous Skills  Once students have attained the alphabetic principle, a more advanced sequence of letter combinations and structural analysis skills is taught to prepare students to read multisyllable words. Chapter 4 describes strategies to teach these more complex words.

Although this chapter describes how to teach the letter–sound relationships needed to develop alphabetic principle, many systematic phonics programs also incorporate spelling and writing as soon as the students learn their first letter sound. After learning to say letter sounds, students learn to write those same sounds. As students learn to read words, they are taught to spell those same words and incorporate them into their writing.

Following a skill sequence such as the letter sounds and word reading ones described in the text does not mean that each skill is taught by itself and then dropped when the next skill in the sequence is introduced. In a systematic phonics program, newly introduced skills remain in play even as other newer skills are introduced. For example, once students have learned a few common letter sounds, carefully planned instruction bounces
between applying these new sounds to reading words in lists and passages, and applying them to spelling and written expression. The following description chronicles a typical day’s instruction in the classroom of a teacher using a systematic and explicit phonics program. Notice how Mr. Hohnberger incorporates multiple skills from the Sequence For Teaching Alphabetic Principle hierarchy as he works to develop alphabetic principle with his class.

By the end of October, Mr. Hohnberger’s first grade class had learned 23 letter sounds and could sound out basic CVC and CVCC words. Since /x/ was the next letter sound presented in the curriculum, Mr. Hohnberger took a few minutes to directly teach his students the /x/ sound. In late fall, Mr. Hohnberger’s goal was to take all of his students from the slower subvocal sounding-out most of them were using to more automatic word decoding. Thus he had his students silently sound out and read 15 CVC and CVCC words the fast way. These words contained the 23 letter sounds he had previously taught. Later in the week, he planned to add words containing the /x/ sound to the word list.

After reading the word lists, three of Mr. Hohnberger’s students passed out a two-page story about two cats who were pals. The students placed the story in front of them and put their reading finger to the left of the first word so they were ready to silently sound out the words, before saying them. By the second reading, his students were ready to answer the comprehension questions he asked about the story and its accompanying picture. When he discovered that a number of students did not know the meaning of *pal*, he directly taught the meaning of that vocabulary word. Mr. Hohnberger was pleased to note that his students were automatically decoding and reading at a normal pace by their third reading. He knew that this carefully coordinated practice was essential for some of his students who were at risk. Mr. Hohnberger was eager for his students to automatically decode on a first read, because that would signal they had fully acquired and were applying alphabetic principle.

After passage reading, Mr. Hohnberger taught his students how to print the letter for the /x/ sound, which students practiced on their chalkboards. Next, Mr. Hohnberger asked the students to segment and write some CVC words that were in the cat story. Before students moved on to the next language arts activity, identifying action verbs, Mr. Hohnberger taught the sight word *would*, which would be in the next week’s story about a fox. Just before Mr. Hohnberger began to teach action verbs, the two students in his class who entered school reading at a second-grade level returned from the second grade class where they went for a large portion of their reading instruction.

How Do I Efficiently Assess and Monitor Students’ Progress with the Alphabetic Principle?

Teachers need to assess two key skills until their students have attained alphabetic principle: individual letter–sound correspondences and sounding out words. Careful assessment of the individual letter sounds informs a teacher when to introduce regular word sounding out. For example, when Ms. Remick assessed her students to determine whether they knew the six letter sounds she taught during the first three weeks of school, almost every student in her class correctly identified the /a/, /m/, /t/, /r/, /s/, and /l/ letter sounds. Because previous assessments in phonemic awareness showed that her students could also segment and blend at the individual sound level, Ms. Remick knew that her students were ready to learn how to sound out CVC words beginning with continuous sounds. After giving the letter–sound assessment Ms. Remick selected a decodable book that had only regular words containing the /a/, /m/, /t/, /l/, and /l/ sounds in addition to three sight words her students knew.
While not a skill that is useful in sounding out words, the ability to name letters of the alphabet rapidly is useful in identifying students who are at risk for future reading problems. The reason for this is that rapid letter naming appears to measure lexical retrieval, or the efficiency with which a reader can locate and apply to reading previously learned information about letters and words stored in long-term memory. Lexical retrieval is an early indicator of fluency and is highly predictive of later reading ability (O’Connor & Jenkins, 1999; Speece, Mills, Ritchey, & Hillman, 2003). That is why DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency is also described in this section.

Teachers also need to directly assess word sounding out to determine whether students are making progress toward attaining alphabetic principle and to determine when students have fully acquired it. Once the alphabetic principle is attained and students are accurately and automatically sounding out words, teachers can begin to introduce more complex combinations of letters, multisyllable words, and passage reading fluency exercises. Letter-sound, letter-naming and word-sounding-out assessments are described in the next section.

Letter–Sound Correspondence: Informal Measure

When Is It Given? Ideally these assessments are given six times during kindergarten or preschool as soon as letters are introduced. If students are first learning letter sounds in higher grades, teachers should coordinate these assessments with the sequence of letters they are teaching, giving the letter–sound assessments after every four or five letters taught in the phonics program. This assessment should always include all of the letter sounds taught from the beginning of the year until the time of the current assessment.

What Score Indicates Success? One-hundred percent accuracy is required. By the end of October, Ms. Bolas taught her class letter sounds for the following letters: a, h, m, d, and s. Then in order to determine whether her instruction was effective, for two days during center time, she worked with one student at a time giving them a brief letter–sound assessment. The student test sheet, score sheet, and directions for the letter–sound assessment she gave are shown in Figures 3.3 and 3.4.

Note that in the measure, only the letters Ms. Bolas taught until the end of October were assessed. Note also that Ms. Bolas taught her students the sounds for both upper- and lower-case letters. If you are teaching your students the sounds for lower-case letters first, then your assessment should only include lower-case letters. Although some teachers will add a column for letter names, the score for this assessment is based only on the student’s accurate identification of letter sounds so necessary for word reading.

When giving the letter–sound assessment Ms. Bolas put a student test sheet in front of the student. Letters on the test sheet were typed in a large font matching the font used in classroom instruction. While the example above uses manuscript letters, if you are teaching D’Nealian, fonts in that script are available for your classroom computer.

Lexical Retrieval: DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency

When Is It Given? DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) is given at the earliest in September of kindergarten and then three times thereafter in winter and spring of kinder-
Alphabetic Principle

Because the ability to name letters of the alphabet is not directly needed to read beginning words, we recommend that it be used strictly as a screening measure and/or diagnostic measure and not as an outcome or progress monitoring measure. Note also that the validity of this assessment depends on some initial exposure or knowledge of the alphabet. Therefore, when students enter kindergarten without this exposure or knowledge, the measure should be given in winter of kindergarten at the earliest.

What Score Indicates Success? Benchmark levels for DIBELS LNF are shown in Table 3.2. Research shows that students who are not at benchmark on DIBELS LNF are more likely to have difficulties in fluently reading text (Wolf et al., 1986). Students are given a minute to name as many of the upper- and lower-case letters of the alphabet as they can. Directions are shown in Figure 3.5 and a sample teacher score sheet is shown in Figure 3.6. A more detailed explanation of scoring procedures can be found at the DIBELS website: http://dibels.uoregon.edu.
In scoring the DIBELS LNF assessment, give students credit for every letter identified correctly. Note that Desmon, the student in Figure 3.6, identified 28 letters correctly per minute in May of his kindergarten year. This score indicates he is at risk for future reading difficulties. Depending on Desmon’s scores in other areas such as letter sounds, DIBELS Phonemic Segmentation Fluency, and Nonsense Word Fluency, Desmon’s teachers might decide to place him in a Tier 3 intensive reading program.

### TABLE 3.2  Benchmarks for DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning of Kindergarten</th>
<th>Middle of Kindergarten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>If score is . . .</strong></td>
<td><strong>Diagnosis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2</td>
<td>At risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 7</td>
<td>Some risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 or more</td>
<td>Low risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>End of Kindergarten</th>
<th>Beginning of First Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>If score is . . .</strong></td>
<td><strong>Diagnosis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 29</td>
<td>At risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 to 39</td>
<td>Some risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 or more</td>
<td>Low risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In scoring the DIBELS LNF assessment, give students credit for every letter identified correctly. Note that Desmon, the student in Figure 3.6, identified 28 letters correctly per minute in May of his kindergarten year. This score indicates he is at risk for future reading difficulties. Depending on Desmon’s scores in other areas such as letter sounds, DIBELS Phonemic Segmentation Fluency, and Nonsense Word Fluency, Desmon’s teachers might decide to place him in a Tier 3 intensive reading program.

### Directions for Administration:

1. Place the student copy of probe in front of the student.
2. Place the examiner copy on clipboard and position so that the student cannot see what you record.
3. Say these specific directions to the student:
   - Here are some letters (point). Tell me the names of as many letters as you can. When I say “begin,” start here (point to first letter), and go across the page (point). Point to each letter and tell me the name of that letter. If you come to a letter you don’t know I’ll tell it to you. Put your finger on the first letter. Ready, begin.
4. Start your stop watch.
5. Follow along on the screening probe. Put a slash (/) through letters named incorrectly (see score sheet in Figure 3.6).
6. If the student provides the letter sound rather than the letter name, say, “Remember to tell me the letter name, not the sound it makes.” This prompt may be provided once during the administration. If the student continues providing letter sounds, mark each letter as incorrect and indicate what the student did at the bottom of the page.
7. At the end of 1 minute, place a bracket (]) after the last letter named and say “Stop.”

### FIGURE 3.5  DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) Assessment Directions

Alphabetic Principle: DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency

**When Is It Given?** The DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency Assessment (NWF) is given at least three times per year when students are first learning to sound out words. Since the Report of the National Reading Panel clearly indicated that phonics instruction taught before the end of first grade is more effective than phonics instruction introduced later, the DIBELS NWF is typically given from the middle of kindergarten until the beginning of grade 2. Because teachers need to regularly monitor student progress towards attaining alphabetic principle, ideally the DIBELS NWF assessment should be given at least every month or more frequently. Once students meet the benchmark score, they do not need to be monitored as closely. A sample student test sheet, score sheet, and directions for the assessment are shown in Figures 3.7 and 3.8 (pp. 80 and 81).

**What Score Indicates Success?** Benchmark levels for the DIBELS NWF are shown in Table 3.3 (p. 81). Note that a score of 50 to 60 letter sounds correct per minute with at least 15 words read as whole words shows that students have attained the alphabetic principle. These children are more likely to meet grade-level benchmarks on future assessments of oral passage reading fluency (Good et al., 2002).

As the name suggests, in the DIBELS Nonsense Word Reading assessment students are given 1 minute to read a series of make-believe words, all having the most common sounds of letters arranged according to the CVC word pattern. The advantage of using nonsense words to measure the alphabetic principle is that nonsense words can only be decoded by accurate sounding out. Nonsense words control for context as well as sight word memorization and are therefore a relatively pristine measure of a student’s ability to sound out. Students who

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** FIGURE 3.6  Sample DIBELS LNF Score Sheet (for Desmon)**


**Alphabetic Principle: DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency**

**When Is It Given?** The DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency Assessment (NWF) is given at least three times per year when students are first learning to sound out words. Since the Report of the National Reading Panel clearly indicated that phonics instruction taught before the end of first grade is more effective than phonics instruction introduced later, the DIBELS NWF is typically given from the middle of kindergarten until the beginning of grade 2. Because teachers need to regularly monitor student progress towards attaining alphabetic principle, ideally the DIBELS NWF assessment should be given at least every month or more frequently. Once students meet the benchmark score, they do not need to be monitored as closely. A sample student test sheet, score sheet, and directions for the assessment are shown in Figures 3.7 and 3.8 (pp. 80 and 81).

**What Score Indicates Success?** Benchmark levels for the DIBELS NWF are shown in Table 3.3 (p. 81). Note that a score of 50 to 60 letter sounds correct per minute with at least 15 words read as whole words shows that students have attained the alphabetic principle. These children are more likely to meet grade-level benchmarks on future assessments of oral passage reading fluency (Good et al., 2002).

As the name suggests, in the DIBELS Nonsense Word Reading assessment students are given 1 minute to read a series of make-believe words, all having the most common sounds of letters arranged according to the CVC word pattern. The advantage of using nonsense words to measure the alphabetic principle is that nonsense words can only be decoded by accurate sounding out. Nonsense words control for context as well as sight word memorization and are therefore a relatively pristine measure of a student’s ability to sound out. Students who

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** FIGURE 3.6  Sample DIBELS LNF Score Sheet (for Desmon)**

can read enough nonsense words within a minute to achieve a score of 50–60 letter sounds correct per minute by winter of first grade are automatically decoding. The DIBELS score of 50–60, with at least 15 words read as whole words, indicates that you can predict that students will be reading at grade level by the end of first grade. If first-grade students whose scores are below 50 do not show continuous progress from testing period to testing period, you know that they need additional support immediately in order to read at grade level by the end of the year. In situations in which students have already been exposed to systematic, explicit phonics, you may want to use the higher figure of 60 as your benchmark cutoff.

In scoring the DIBELS NWF assessment, give students credit for every letter–sound correspondence identified correctly, regardless of whether the sounds are identified individually or as a part of a whole word. For example, when Jamarius came to the nonsense word *bif*, he read it as three separate sounds, /b/-/i/-/f/. He received a score of 3 for three letter sounds identified correctly. When Matoria came to the same word, she said *bif* accurately, decoding the entire nonsense word as a whole word. Although Matoria also received 3 points, one for each letter sound in the word, her final score was higher because by reading the nonsense words as whole words she rapidly moved through the nonsense words, receiving credit for more letter sounds than Jamarius. This example shows how students’ nonsense scores increase and eventually reach the benchmark of 50–60 letter sounds correct per minute once they begin to read nonsense words at the word level, where sounding is automatic and internal. In the event students score 50–60...
Name: ______________________  Date: ______________________

f a p  b o s  f i c  d i f  v i m  ____/15
l o m  o v  v e f  h i z  b e j  ____/14
r i z  m a g  v e g  f e v  u b  ____/14
y u f  h o z  w u c  m i d  m e z  ____/15
n a k  y i p  w u l  f e c  k a l  ____/15
k u d  z u t  j u b  s u p  a d  ____/14
t o f  n e z  l a l  d o c  b u j  ____/15
r u d  p e s  s i g  n u d  z u r  ____/15
a c  r i s  w o v  b o l  t a j  ____/14
m o d  r o g  m o z  w u c  r o m  ____/15

Total: ____

Error Pattern:

FIGURE 3.8  DIBELS NWF Assessment and Score Sheet (Blank)

TABLE 3.3  Benchmarks for DIBELS NWF Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Middle of Kindergarten</th>
<th>End of Kindergarten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>If score is . . .</strong></td>
<td><strong>Diagnosis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>At risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 12</td>
<td>Some risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 or more</td>
<td>Low risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning of First Grade</th>
<th>Middle of First Grade</th>
<th>End of First Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>If score is . . .</strong></td>
<td><strong>Diagnosis</strong></td>
<td><strong>If score is . . .</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 13</td>
<td>At risk</td>
<td>Less than 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 to 23</td>
<td>Some risk</td>
<td>30 to 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 or more</td>
<td>Low risk</td>
<td>50 to 60 with 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>words read as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>whole words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

by reading single letters only, Good has added the following criterion for meeting benchmark: students must also read at least 15 words as whole words (Good, Kaminski, & Howe, 2005).

By looking at individual student answer patterns as well as the cumulative score, you can tell how to adapt your instruction to reflect where students are in relation to fully developed alphabetic principle. Students go through four definite sounding phases on their way to attaining the alphabetic principle. These phases are shown in Figure 3.9. Note that student 1, Jervon, is still reading at the individual sound level, as indicated by the scoring of his nonsense word reading. Every letter is marked because he only said the individual letter sounds as he read through the test. Student 2, Tori, is at a transitional sounding-out stage; she is still saying the individual sounds for each word, but she is also blending them together into whole words. The third student, Yolanda, is sounding out many words as onset rime before reading them as whole words. She is beginning to read many two-letter words automatically as one word without needing to sound out. At this stage, students’ scores begin to increase substantially as they near alphabetic principle. Finally, the fourth student, Katina, represents a student who has attained alphabetic principle. Of the four students, only Katina will score at benchmark levels. She is ready to sound out more complex words and work on fluency in grade-level text. Jervon needs more practice sounding out and blending basic CVC words. Tori needs to transition to subvocally sounding out words so she begins to read words the fast way or more automatically. Yolanda is almost there. Continued daily practice with word and passage reading will help Yolanda go that extra step and move into fully developed alphabetic principle.

### Figure 3.9 Sample DIBELS Scoring Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sounding-Out Stage</th>
<th>Student #1: Jervon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>lin</strong> <strong>mus</strong> <strong>uk</strong> <strong>dov</strong> <strong>ov</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition Sounding-Out Stage</th>
<th>Student #2: Tori</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>lin</strong> <strong>mus</strong> <strong>uk</strong> <strong>dov</strong> <strong>ov</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Onset Rime Sounding-Out Stage</th>
<th>Student #3: Yolanda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>lin</strong> <strong>mus</strong> <strong>uk</strong> <strong>dov</strong> <strong>ov</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fully Developed Alphabetic Principle</th>
<th>Student #4: Katina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>lin</strong> <strong>mus</strong> <strong>uk</strong> <strong>dov</strong> <strong>ov</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Woodcock Reading Mastery Test Revised (WRMT-R) Word Attack subtest requires students to sound out a series of nonsense words of increasing complexity. While this measure lacks the important fluency component of DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency, its use of nonsense words of types other than basic CVC words can provide teachers with more diagnostic information. Also, the norms are helpful for older students for whom the DIBELS benchmark may not be relevant. For more information, go to [http://ags.pearsonassessments.com/group.asp?nGroupInfoID=a16640](http://ags.pearsonassessments.com/group.asp?nGroupInfoID=a16640).

The Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE) also measures students’ word attack skills as well as the ability to read high frequency sight words. TOWRE is fluency-based and the norming group includes adolescents. For more information go to [http://69.41.181.153/Scripts/prodView.asp?idProduct=1608](http://69.41.181.153/Scripts/prodView.asp?idProduct=1608).
How Do I Teach Students So That They Attain the Alphabetic Principle?

As emphasized in Chapters 1 and 2, the multi-tiered approach described in this text allows teachers to accommodate a range of learners. The teaching enhancements described in those chapters also apply for each of the key skill areas that comprise the alphabetic principle. The general education reading program for children who are at risk is enhanced through the use of advance organizers, unison responding, perky pace, support for new learning using My Turn–Together–Your Turn systematic error corrections, cumulative review, integrated motivational strategies, and teaching to success. The following formats for teaching letter sounds, word reading, and text reading are used for large-group Tier 1 instruction and also small-group, Tier 2 booster sessions. In addition, descriptions of more
intensive programs appropriate for Tier 3 are provided along with special strategies for English language learners and older students.

Identifying Letter–Sound Correspondences

Even when students can segment and blend, before learning to sound out words they must be able to automatically identify some letter-sounds in isolation. For example, Carnine and colleagues (2004) recommend that at least six to eight letter–sound correspondences, including one or two vowels, be taught prior to the introduction of sounding out words. Failure to work on letter sounds in isolation prior to sounding out words can result in problems shown in the following example:

Keionda's teacher showed her how to sound out the word *man* but Keionda had not learned */a˘/*, the most common sound of the letter *a*. Keionda's teacher had to stop the sounding out instruction temporarily in order to practice the */a˘/* sound. Stopping to work on a letter sound that should have been learned previously slowed the pace of the lesson and diverted Keionda's attention from learning the sounding-out strategy. This spur of the moment instruction on the letter sound did not provide enough practice for Keionda to predictably remember */a˘/* the next day.

Many programs teach sounds using an indirect approach. Instead of introducing sounds in isolation, teachers write a list of words that begin with the new letter on the board. After asking the students what sound is the same in all of these words, the teacher has the students say the sound of the new letter. For students with disabilities or who are at risk this approach is clearly not explicit enough. Such an approach does not provide enough practice of the new sound or review of previously introduced sounds. The format in Table 3.4 directly teaches letter–sound correspondences and provides extensive student practice and review. This format is based on ones originally developed by Carnine and colleagues (2004). The first part of this format introduces the new letter sound using the My Turn–Together–Your Turn strategy shown in steps 2–5 in Table 3.4. In Part B of this format, the teacher provides practice of the new letter sound in combination with six or seven other previously introduced sounds. In Part B, the teacher first tests the group (Your Turn) on the new and review sounds before checking student mastery by calling on individual students to say the sounds.

Figure 3.10 shows the LOOP signal used by the teacher to elicit unison answers from the group. As shown, the teacher first points to the left of the letter, provides a thinking pause, asks “what sound,” and then loops his finger to touch underneath the letter. He pauses under the letter two to three seconds for continuous sounds and immediately bounces out for stop sounds. When he bounces off to return to the starting point or loops back to the starting point, students stop saying the letter sound. In this way, the teacher can calibrate the length of time students say the sound.

**Four Best Practices for Teaching Letter Sounds** Let's look at how Mrs. Nguyen taught letter sounds to her class, using the following four effective teaching strategies.

**Use Classroom Time Efficiently** Since many of Mrs. Nguyen's students came to school with limited language skills, she started teaching letter sounds by the second week of school. Although the regular curriculum was designed to teach one letter sound a week, she knew that she could not waste any time because many of her kindergartners would need two weeks on each vowel and the more difficult consonants. Every morning after calendar time, she immediately started her language arts instruction by following the letter sound format in Table 3.4 for 3 to 5 minutes. If a morning assembly was scheduled so that it coincided with letter–sound practice time, she either skipped calendar time and inserted letter–sound practice or went through the drill exercises immediately after the assembly.
**TABLE 3.4** Format for Introducing New Letter Sounds in the General Curriculum: Part A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>After seeing a new letter, students say its sound with 100% accuracy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Materials Needed**
Board, chart paper, or overhead transparency and writing implement

**Signaling**
Before starting letter–sound drill, students should practice responding to your loop signal, so they learn to say the sound of the letter as long as your finger stays on the letter. Place your finger to the left of the letter. *“What sound?” initiates the signal for unison answers.*

*Signal for continuous sounds:* After looping to the letter, hold your finger under it for 2 seconds as students say the sound before looping your finger back to the starting point.

*Signal for stop sounds:* After looping to the letter, immediately bounce your finger out as students say the sound and return to the starting point.

**Time**
3–5 minutes

**Instructions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Advance Organizer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My Turn (examples given for continuous and stop sounds)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a lower case letter <em>s</em> on the board and point to the letter:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Signal for continuous sounds:</em> (finger to the left of letter) “Here’s our new sound for today.” (loop signal) “/s/.” (loop back to starting point) “This letter says” (loop signal) “/s/” (end signal).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a lower case letter <em>t</em> on the board and point to the letter:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Signal for stop sounds:</em> (finger to the left of letter) “Here’s our new sound for today.” (loop signal and bounce out) “/t/.” (back to starting point) “This letter says” (loop signal and bounce out) “/t/” (end signal).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher answers with students this time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Signal for continuous sounds:</em> (finger to the left of letter) “Together. What sound?” (loop signal) “/s/.” (loop back to starting point) “Yes, /s/.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Signal for stop sounds:</em> (finger to the left of letter) “Together. What sound?” (loop signal and bounce out) “/t/.” (back to starting point) “Yes, /t/.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat this sequence several times.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Your Turn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Signal for continuous sounds:</em> (finger to the left of letter) “Your turn. What sound?” (loop signal) (answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, /s/.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Signal for stop sounds:</em> (finger to the left of letter) “Your turn. What sound?” (loop signal and bounce out) (answer) (back to starting point) “Yes, /t/.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat several times.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Individual Student Checkout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Signal for continuous sounds:</em> (finger to the left of letter) “Individual turns. What sound? Marissa.” (loop signal) (answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, /s/.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Signal for stop sounds:</em> (finger to the left of letter) “Individual turns. What sound? Tonia.” (loop signal and bounce out) (answer) (back to starting point) “Yes, /t/.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call on several individual students and check accuracy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Error Correction**
If students make an error, immediately return to a My Turn–Together–Your Turn pattern. You may need to refocus students to your mouth position as you say the letter.

**Perk up Your Drill**
- Occasionally signal using an unusual pointer such as a puppet’s hand, a wand, or a baton. Decorate a pointer to fit the occasion; dress it up with ribbons and glitter or an appropriate theme for the time of year.

*Continued*
Perk up Your Drill (continued)

Some teachers teach their students to fingerspell the new letter as they say it. Other teachers add easier hand signals for the more difficult letters. For example, when students say /p/, the teacher has them point their finger down; when students say /v/ the teacher holds up a pretend antenna to represent an insect. Signals can provide extra motivation as long as teachers eventually fade them out. Signals should not interfere with the pace of instruction.

Adaptations

Before teaching the new letter sound, see if students in the class can repeat the new sound after they hear you say it. Some students may need articulation practice. For example, if students have difficulty saying /p/, put your fingers to your lips and show the students how your lips pop when you say the /p/ sound. Next ask the students to put their fingers on their lips and make the same lip-popping sound. If some of the students are vocalizing the /b/ sound instead of /p/ sound, ask students to put their hands on their neck in order to feel the difference between a voiced sound and an unvoiced sound.

In the beginning some students may need to look into a small hand-held mirror in order to make the new letter sound.

Refer to the letter–sound chart in Table 1.4 for more introductory tips for teaching letter sounds.

Format for Introducing New Letter Sounds in the General Curriculum: Part B

On the second day you teach a new letter sound, add Part B to your lesson.

Outcome

After seeing 26 letters, students say their sounds with 100% accuracy.

Materials Needed

Board, chart paper, or overhead transparency, a writing implement, and a list of letter sounds learned to date.

Signaling

Before starting letter–sound drill, students should practice responding to your loop signal, so they learn to say the sound of the letter as long as your finger stays on the letter. Place your finger to the left of the letter. “What sound?” initiates the signal for unison answers.

Signal for continuous sounds: After looping to the letter, hold your finger under it for 2 seconds as students say the sound before looping your finger back to the starting point.

Signal for stop sounds: After looping to the letter, bounce your finger out as students say the sound and return to the starting point.

Time

3–5 minutes

Instructions

1. Advance Organizer

2. Your Turn

The teacher uses an alternating pattern to teach the new letter sound by writing the new lower-case letter on the board followed by one previously taught letter, followed by two previously taught letters. This pattern is continued until five letters separate the last two new letters (for example, /s/ /t/ /s/ /m/ /t/ /a/ /h/ /m/ /f/). The teacher provides more practice identifying the more difficult previously taught letters and vowels by including them in the list every day.

Signal for continuous sounds: (finger to the left of letter) “Your turn. What sound?” (loop signal) (answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, /s/.”

Signal for stop sounds: (finger to the left of letter) “Your turn. What sound?” (loop signal and bounce out) (answer) (back to starting point) “Yes, /t/.”

3. Individual Student Checkout

Signal for continuous sounds: (finger to the left of letter) “Individual turns. What sound? Kyle.” (loop signal) (answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, /s/.”
For New Letter Sounds, Use Part A Steps 1–5

When teaching a new letter sound, Mrs. Nguyen used the format in Table 3.4 Part A: Steps 1–5 for the first two or three days. If students said the new sound accurately, she moved to Steps 4–5 (Your Turn) before asking individual student checkouts. Thus, last week when introducing /b/, Mrs. Nguyen first checked that all of her students could articulate the explosive lip-popping sound. Then she spent the first two days carefully moving her teaching from Step 2 (My Turn) through Step 5 until the individual checkouts assured her that all of the students were saying /b/ when she pointed to the letter. By Wednesday her students were so solid on the /b/ sound that they no longer needed all of the My Turn–Together steps and so her instruction on /b/ began at Part A: Step 4. By this time, she could easily move to the Part B review after a minute.

When Reviewing Letter Sounds with the Format in Table 3.4 Part B, Use Steps 2–3 for All of the Letter Sounds

Every day after teaching the new sound of the week, Mrs. Nguyen reviewed the previous letters. Immediately after practicing the new /b/ sound, Mrs. Nguyen used the format in Table 3.4 Part B, reviewing the /b/, /s/, /a/, and /m/ sounds that she had taught the first month and a half of school.

Give More Individual Turns to Students Who Have the Most Difficulty

Shoshana, Greg, and Tracy’s scores on last month’s letter–sound assessment showed that they had learned the fewest sounds, so Mrs. Nguyen asked them more questions during individual student checkouts.

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**TABLE 3.4 Continued**

| Error Correction | Signal for stop sounds: (finger to the left of letter) "Individual turns. What /\ . . . .

sound? Lynnette." (loop signal and bounce out) (answer) (back to starting
point) "Yes, /\ . . . ."

Call on several individual students to check accuracy. |
|---|---|

If students make an error, immediately return to a My Turn–Together–Your Turn pattern. Then alternate between the missed letter and familiar letters until students identify the missed letter correctly three times.

For example, if you are working on a, m, r, s, and i, and the students missed s, say, (finger to the left of letter) "This sound is /s/" before asking, "What sound?" (loop signal and end) "Yes, /s/.

Then ask the students to identify letter sounds using the following alternating pattern: a s m i r m.

**Perk up Your Drill**

- Vary the color of the letters.
- Hold your pointer finger on a continuous sound letter for an extra second or two and praise everyone who had enough air to hold it the entire time.
- Occasionally tell students that they will say the sounds in booming lion voices, in squeaky mouse voices, or in robot voices.
- Tell the students that later in the day, you will suddenly stop what you are doing and ask them to say the sound of the new letter. Challenge students to surprise you and remember the sound.
- Present a challenge. When students are at mastery on the letter-sounds, tell students you will try to trick them by going at a speedy "Road Runner" pace.

**Adaptations**

- When students have reached 100% accuracy on Part B, you can begin to use a combination of upper-case and lower-case letters.

Source: This script is based on one originally developed and field tested by Carnine, Silbert, Kame’enui, and Tarver, (2004). Direct Instruction Reading (4th ed.). New Jersey, Merrill Prentice Hall.
Writing Letter–Sound Correspondences

Students’ learning of letter sounds is enhanced when they are required to write or spell what they are reading. Therefore, when you are teaching the letter sounds in isolation, students should also write as well as say the sounds. For example, Ms. Chapelle’s students can identify the most common sounds for the following letters: s, r, m, t, a, and d. After practicing these sounds with the letter–sound format, Ms. Chapelle has her students take out their white boards and write the same sounds from dictation using the format shown in Figure 3.11.

Providing Differentiated Instruction

The following lesson introducing the most common sound for the letter u is a typical lesson from a modern reading curriculum:

*Say us and under slowly, focusing on the /u/ sound. Ask the students what sound they hear at the beginning of both words. Write a large upper case U and lower case u on the blackboard and say, “This is upper-case U and this is lower-case u.” Tell the students that a vowel can stand for several sounds. Call on volunteers to identify words on a rhyme printed on a chart that begin with the letter u.*

*Write us and under on the chart and have the students tell you other words that begin with the /u/ sound. Add these words to the chart and read them all together with the students.*

This activity is likely to create several problems for children who are at risk. First, and most importantly, the lesson doesn’t provide adequate practice and support by introducing the letter sound using a My Turn–Together–Your Turn strategy. Students never directly hear what sound the letter u makes, nor are they given any direct practice on saying the sound while the teacher points to the letter. Pointing to u words in the rhyme and volunteering words that begin with u can all be done without knowing the letter sound of the written letter u. If the teacher has called on individual students to answer these questions, adequate practice for everyone is not provided. Students who are at risk will be unlikely to be able to identify the u sound when they come to a word.

Another problem with this lesson is that the words on the chart that students read are not in any way coordinated with the sounds and skills they have already learned. During the previous week students may have learned the difficult letter sound /j/, which still needs daily practice. When words on the chart do not incorporate cumulative review, prior learning is...
Seize the Teachable Moment

Help Your Students Articulate and Differentiate Sounds

The b vs d Conundrum
When your daily teaching shows that some of the first graders are still mixing lower case b’s with d’s, they will benefit from practicing reading words with these sounds. The key to this practice is focusing on accuracy. Make a list of four three- or four-phoneme words containing d’s or b’s and give a point for every word read correctly. Tell the student that 10 points wins the game.

Getting Students to Hear j
These tips about the production of /j/ should make your task easier if students are saying a different sound for this letter. According to the Lindamood-Bell LIPS Program, /j/ is a “Noisy Fat-Pushed Air” sound (Lindamood & Lindamood, 1998).

Why Is /j/ Noisy????
If you put your hand on your throat as you say /j/, you can feel the vibration. With quiet sounds such as /s/ and /sl/, you will not feel this vibration. Help your children feel their neck vibrate as they make the /j/ sound.

What Is “Fat-Pushed Air?”
As you say the /j/ sound, hold the back of your hand in front of your mouth and feel the air push out. Unlike /s/ or /sh/, where one’s air comes out in a smooth flow, the /j/ sound requires a fat-push of air that sprays all over.

What Else Can I Do to Help My Students Hear This Sound?
Practice the “segmenting first-sound” phonemic awareness drill exercises from Chapter 2. Compose a list of /j/ words that are familiar to your students with words like jet, jump, jelly, and jellybean. Following the script, say, “My turn, jet. First sound? /j/.” Follow this with a Together and Your Turn until the children begin to produce a clear /j/ sound. Remember to loudly and clearly say the /j/ sound, overaccentuating it. You will have to work at saying /j/ loud and clear so that your children distinctly hear it.

The Elusive /e˘/
Frequently some first graders and kindergartners will confuse the sounds of /e˘/ and /a˘/. For example, when asked to blend /p/-/e˘/-/n/, students confusing these two phonemes reply pan. They are likely to make the same mistake when reading the word pan. When asked what the new word means, they proudly explain that it is something to write with. Slipping the following activities into your day will help end the confusion:

- These students would benefit from 5 to 10 minutes every day of practice blending, segmenting, and spelling words with these two sounds.
- Play a short game where the children hold up one “man” if you say man, and two “men” if you say men.
- Ask students to say cook if you say pan, and write if you say pen.
- Make sure that students can write e when you say that sound. Expect students to sound-write all the vowels.
- Write the vowels in a circle on the board and have the students “say the vowel circle,” as you point to the letters. Listen to be certain they are accurately saying each sound. Be sure that your voice and jaw go down when you say /a˘/, overaccentuating the dip.
- Line up with a vowel focus: As you call students to line up, instead of saying, “Table 1 Line Up,” ask Table 1 to first say the sound for /e˘/ before lining up. Locate your students at Table 1 who still have vowel confusion and ask them to individually tell you the difficult letter sound. Example: “Table 1, tell me the sound of short e before you line up.” (signal) “Good. Jessie and Dustin, let me hear you say the short a sound one more time.” (signal) “Table 2 . . . .”
frequently forgotten. Students are encouraged to memorize the words, thus promoting the idea that reading words involves memorization, not sounding out.

Adapting this lesson for students who are at risk includes adding more My Turn–Together–Your Turn opportunities so everyone gets enough practice. The format for introducing new letter sounds in the general curriculum, which is detailed in Table 3.4 beginning on page 85, can be used by teachers to instruct any new letter sound. Once students receive more directed instruction and practice the new sound by itself, teachers build in practice of the new sound along with previously introduced sounds using Part B of the same format. Any teacher using a reading curriculum containing lessons similar to the example /u/ lesson can modify letter–sound activities by starting lessons using the formats included in Table 3.4. Although it is important that students directly see how the letter sounds and phonemic awareness they are learning relate to word reading, having students read these words as sight words can undermine their acquisition of the alphabetic principle. Instead of having students read the words, ask the students to say the first letter sound when you point to and read the words on the chart.

Reading Regular Words Is a Three-Part Process

The ultimate goal of instruction in reading regular words is helping your students attain the alphabetic principle; this means obtaining a score of 50 or greater on DIBELS Non-sense Word Fluency while reading at least 15 of the nonsense words as whole words. When students reach alphabetic principle they move beyond the individual sound level and automatically decode groups of letter sounds as chunks. There are three parts to the format for reading regular words. In Part 1, students sound out each word orally, receiving added support from the teacher using My Turn–Together–Your Turn as needed. In Part 2, students continue to sound out the words, but do so in their heads. In Part 3 student sounding out is at an automatic level; students read each regular word the fast way, without any conscious sounding out. In this section a description of each of these parts, including when to use them based on students’ DIBELS NWF scores, will be provided.

Part 1: Sounding Out Orally  Sounding out regular words should begin as soon as possible, because phonemic awareness and knowledge of letter sounds are not sufficient for students who are at risk. Systematic, explicit instruction in sounding out words is a third component for learning to read. Students who are at risk require extensive practice sounding out words before they attain the alphabetic principle. Solid sounding out and blending of regular words is a key prerequisite to the automatic recognition of words necessary for fluent reading. When students sound out loud, the teacher can closely monitor their accuracy, providing corrections and additional teaching when needed.

You can begin teaching students to sound out words as soon as they have learned between six and eight letter sounds, including one or two common vowel sounds, and have met benchmark levels in oral segmenting and blending (see Chapter 2). Beginning sounding out is most effectively taught when word selection is first confined to the CVC variants. As described earlier, these are one-syllable words formed using the most common sounds of all single consonants and vowels. Some teachers may want to follow the easy-to-hard sequence of CVC words shown in Figure 3.1 (p. 71), starting with CVC words that begin with continuous sounds, because these are the words easiest to blend.

In Part 1 of regular word reading, students orally sound out regular words. This teaching procedure, which is shown in Table 3.5, is most helpful for students at the sounding-out stage as represented by a score of less than 30 on DIBELS NWF, with few if any nonsense words read as whole words. Part 1 stresses several critical skills required to sound out words: sounding out words from left to right and attending to every letter in the word before reading the whole word. Note that students are first taught to sound out words
**TABLE 3.5** Format for Reading Regular Words—Part 1: Oral Sounding-Out

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>After seeing a regular word, students orally sound out the letter sounds before saying the word.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials Needed</strong></td>
<td>Board, chart paper, or overhead transparency and writing implement. Write the regular words that students will read in rows on the board. For example, if students are reading eight words, write two rows of four words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Signaling</strong></td>
<td>Three-part signal: Finger is in starting position to the left of the word. “Sound out,” or “What word” initiates the signal for unison answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Use loop signal for orally sounding out the letter sounds in the words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. As students are saying the final letter sound, immediately loop finger back to the starting point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Pause for a moment of think time before asking students “What word?” and side-slash to the end of the word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>Depends on number of new words and difficulty level. Kindergarten students often work on this skill between 5 and 15 minutes each day. First grade students may need to work on this skill for up to 20 minutes if the curriculum has introduced many new words or a new letter-sound pattern. Older students with alphabetic principle may only have a few new one-syllable words that are appropriate for this format.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Teacher</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Advance Organizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. My Turn (Note: See Ms. Elizondo’s fourth tip on page 93 in the text to determine whether to start at Step 2, 3, or 4.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(finger to the left of the first letter) “My turn sounding out this word.” (loop from letter to letter) “/f/-/a/-/n/” (loop back to starting point) “What word?” (side-slash signal) “fan.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher answers with students this time:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(finger to the left of the first letter) “Together, sound out this word.” (loop from letter to letter) “/f/-/a/-/n/” (loop back to starting point) “What word?” (side-slash signal) “fan.” (loop to starting point) “Yes, fan.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Your Turn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(finger to the left of the first letter) “Your turn to sound out this word.” (loop from letter to letter) (answer) (loop back to starting point) “What word?” (side-slash signal) (answer) (loop to starting point) “Yes, fan.” Repeat step 4 for every word in the row.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Individual Student Checkout:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Point to the first regular word written on the board (fan) and place your finger slightly to the left of the word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Individual turns. Sound out this word. Grant.” (loop from letter to letter) (answer) (loop to starting point) “What word?” (side-slash signal) (answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, fan.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sound out this word. Leila.” (loop from letter to letter) (answer) (loop back to starting point) “What word?” (side-slash signal) (answer) (loop to starting point) “Yes, sip.” Call on several students to check for accuracy. When students’ correct answers show you that they know all of the words in the row, move to the second row of words. Be sure to move to using mainly Your Turns as soon as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Error Correction</strong></td>
<td>If students make an error, immediately return to a My Turn—Together—Your Turn pattern, always requiring them to sound out the word. Then return to the beginning of the row and have students reread words the fast way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
in lists, so that they avoid the use of picture and context cues. Picture and context cues can undermine student acquisition of the alphabetic principle by encouraging guessing and are not recommended when teaching beginning students who are at risk to read. Reading cues will be discussed at length later in this chapter and in Chapter 4. Students should remain at Part 1 of regular word reading until they are able to sound out lists of CVC words with 100% accuracy, and without the teacher having to provide support in the form of My Turn–Together–Your Turn.

The signaling procedure for Part 1 of reading regular words is shown in Figure 3.12. First the teacher points to the left of the word to show that sounding always begins on the left side of a word and that sounding is about to begin. The teacher then uses a looping motion as she moves from letter to letter in the word. Students say the letter sound as the

![Signal for Sounding Out Regular Words](image-url)
teacher’s finger rests underneath the letter for one or two seconds. As students are saying the final letter sound, the teacher immediately loops her finger back to the first letter sound. After a pause, the teacher asks students, “What word?” and side-slashes to the end of the word.

Five Best Practices for Teaching Oral Sounding-Out  Let’s look at how Ms. Elizondo used Part 1 of regular word reading with her students at the sounding stage using the following five best practices:

Provide more time as needed for teaching difficult skills to mastery.  Most of Ms. Elizondo’s students came to first grade knowing their letter sounds. Many of them still needed more practice blending because they slowly and often inaccurately sounded out words. In order to make sure that her students had fully developed alphabetic principle by January, she spent more time than the general education reading curriculum recommended on word reading, including the sounding out comprising Part 1. Every day before class, she wrote the new words in the regular curriculum on the board and started by using the Part 1 format listed in Table 3.5 to teach them. Although the curriculum recommended a lesson a day, when the words were especially difficult, she spent two or even three days on the problematic lesson. Because the principal had decided that morning language arts instruction was sacred and that all assemblies or other activities would always be scheduled in the afternoon, she was more confident moving through the curriculum at a slower pace. With nothing interfering in the morning, she had gained more teaching days.

Avoid adding schwas to stop sounds.  Ms. Elizondo was careful to avoid adding schwas to her sounds when using the My Turn strategy the first time through the word list. Although she had learned the correct pronunciation of letter sounds, the teaching coach had pointed out that when Ms. Elizondo was blending words, she sometimes added those cumbersome schwas. While the coach was observing her, she had actually blended *pal* as /puh/+a+/luh/. Sometimes bad habits pop up at the most embarrassing times. Ms. Elizondo was careful so that situation never happened again.

Calibrate think time to difficulty of the task.  Once Ms. Elizondo moved from the My Turn step, she was careful to calibrate the amount of think time that she provided students before asking “What word?” If she didn’t pause between the time when students said the letter sounds and when they said the entire word, only her best students would answer. Ms. Elizondo knew that when those three or four louder readers answered at lightening speed, she could easily be fooled into believing that the entire class knew the new words taught that day. The first time she had students read the words on a new list, she gave more think time than on the second or third time, because her goal was having students read the words faster.

When students are successful sounding out new words, start teaching at Step 4.  Continue using the entire My Turn–Together–Your Turn sequence for more difficult new words. Although during the first and sometimes the second time reading the word list Ms. Elizondo carefully progressed through all of the steps in Table 3.5, when her students were more proficient and orally sounding out the words independently she phased out the My Turn and Together steps and started teaching at Step 4 (Your Turn). As soon as Ms. Elizondo noticed that her students were reading new CVC words accurately and more rapidly the first time they saw them, she began encouraging independence by also starting at Step 4 for the new word lists. After all, Ms. Elizondo knew that readers must develop confidence when sounding out new words they are seeing for the first time. When a more difficult word was on the new list that she anticipated her students would miss, she continued to use the entire My Turn–Together–Your Turn sequence for that word.
Use assessment information to determine individual turns. Every day Ms. Elizondo gave more turns during individual checkouts to her students who received the lowest scores on the DIBELS Nonsense Word Assessment. She knew that they would receive extra practice reading the words in the afternoon during booster sessions, but she also wanted to provide extra practice during her morning teaching session. When her students were able to sound out words accurately without her help Ms. Elizondo added Part 2 of regular word reading to her daily instruction in reading regular words.

Providing Differentiated Instruction

Typical Activity. A typical reading curriculum details an early word reading lesson in which the purpose of the activity is blending sounds into words using the new letter sound /n/ and several other letter sounds previously introduced. The teacher is instructed to give each student the following letter cards: n, i, a, p, and t and tell everyone to place each letter into their mini pocket chart. As each letter is placed in the chart, the students are to say its sound.

Next the teacher is advised to place the letters a and n in her large pocket chart and direct the students to do the same in their small ones. Instructions in the curriculum guide indicate that the teacher should demonstrate blending the word an by sliding her hand under the letters as she slowly stretches the sounds /a˘a˘an/. She is supposed to say the word an naturally before asking her students to do the same.

Finally, the teacher is instructed to give the following directions before students blend sounds to read new words:

"Put p at the beginning. What word did you make?" (pan)
"Change the a in pan to i. What word did you make?" (pin)
"Make the p and n change places. What word did you make?" (nip)

Weaknesses of the Activity. The major problem with this activity is that the teacher doesn't provide enough support for blending sounds into words. She does one My Turn when she blends the word an before immediately moving into a Your Turn. Usually multiple My Turns and Togethers are necessary when teaching students to blend sounds for the first time. More confusion is introduced when the teacher follows this one example with a series of Your Turns, expecting students to form new words by moving letters around. Evidently, the teacher assumes that with no guided practice, after one example, students who are at risk need to learn blending. Unless modified, this activity does not provide the support and practice that many students who are at risk need to learn blending. A final problem with this activity is that students are asked to respond individually with their own letters. Managing students' behavior and monitoring their work under these conditions present additional challenges in many classrooms.

Enhancing the Activity. This activity described above could be adapted in a number of ways. First, to avoid the behavior management and monitoring problems that can occur when using manipulatives in a large group, the teacher could have students respond in unison as she manipulates the letters on her large pocket chart. The teacher could also use the format in Table 3.5, injecting My Turn–Together–Your Turn for each of the words the first time the students blend them. The second time through the list, the teacher could switch to Your Turns for these same words, first asking students to sound out each word before reading it the fast way. The teacher could also use individual turns with some of her lowest performers to make sure that all of the students acquire the emphasized word reading skill.

Part 2: Sounding Out Words Subvocally A key goal of reading instruction is the accurate, fluent reading of connected text. Once students can orally sound out words independently with a high degree of accuracy, teachers need to prepare them for the next
phase in attaining the alphabetic principle by adding Part 2 to their daily regular word reading instruction: sounding out words in their heads, or **subvocal sounding-out**. It was once thought that fluent adult readers relied mainly on context and background knowledge to figure out words, engaging in what was often called a guessing game as they made their way through connected text. More recent research shows just the opposite; while mature readers are fluent, they still attend to the letters in words, but at an automatic level. Pau sing to look at pictures or use word attack strategies that focus on the middle or the end of the word interrupts the reading process. Consider this description by Shaywitz (2003) of a mature reader encountering a new word.

She sees a word and scans all the letters. Do any of the letters fall into a familiar pattern? Do they resemble letter groups—parts of words—that she has stored? If so, she is able to take these letter patterns and connect them to a known pronunciation. For example, if she sees the unfamiliar printed word *architect*, meaning a designer of buildings, she may know that the letters t-e-c-t- go together and how they are pronounced. She may also know from experience that the letters a-r-c-h are often grouped together and that arch sounds either like arch of your foot or Noah’s ark. She tries to pronounce the unknown word both ways, architect or ar-ki-tect, and uses the surrounding text to judge which pronunciation fits. From the context, she realizes that the word is *architect*, meaning a designer of buildings, and is pronounced like ark (ar-ki-teckt). Once she has successfully decoded this word, it joins the other words stored in her lexicon. (p. 104)

Note that in this example, the reader first scans the word from left to right looking for graphophonemic cues. Only after the reader looks at the letters does she use context cues to make her final decoding decision. This example demonstrates the importance of the alphabetic principle and why it needs to be established first, before other decoding cues such as using the context are introduced.

Teachers cannot assume that most students who are at risk will make a successful transition from oral sounding out to silently reading words the fast way without adding a transition step that provides subvocal sounding-out practice. Once students no longer need to say each sound aloud, their speed with word reading will increase. Part 2 of regular word reading is a format for helping students make the transition from sounding out loud to sounding out words in their heads. This teaching procedure is especially effective for students who are still scoring below 30 on the DIBELS NWF but are at the transition sounding-out stage described earlier in the chapter. The transition sounding-out stage means that they are still saying the individual sounds in words but are blending them into whole words as well. The format for Part 2 of regular word reading is shown in Table 3.6.

The signals used for subvocal sounding-out are the same as those used for sounding out words aloud. The only difference is that when the teacher engages in the looping motion from letter to letter, students are mouthing the sounds without saying them out loud. The only time the students answer out loud is when the teacher asks them to identify the word.

**Three Best Practices for Teaching Subvocal Sounding-Out**  
Ms. Elizondo was delighted when she was able to add Part 2, subvocal sounding-out, to her daily instruction in regular word reading. She used Part 2 when her students were able to first sound out the words for the day with 100% accuracy using Part 1. She then moved to Part 2 while using the following three best practices to help her students transition to subvocal sounding-out:

**Carefully watch students’ eye movements.**  
Ms. Elizondo carefully watched eye movement to check if students’ eyes were moving from left to right as they directly looked at the words on the board. When she saw someone’s eyes staring in the distance, she tapped their shoulder or called their name to redirect them to the reading work. Because Ms. Elizondo wanted to maintain a motivating classroom, she gave student points for paying attention to the words.
TABLE 3.6 Format for Reading Regular Words—Part 2: Subvocal Sounding-Out

Outcome After seeing a regular word, student subvocally sounds out the letter sounds before saying the word.

Materials Needed Board, chart paper, or overhead transparency and writing implement. Write the regular words that students will read in rows on the board. For example, if students are reading eight words, write two rows of four words.

Signaling Three-part signal: Finger is in starting position to the left of the word. “Ready,” “Sound out in your heads,” or “What word?” initiates the signal for unison answers.
1. Use loop signal for orally sounding out the letter-sounds in the words.
2. As students are saying the final letter sound, immediately loop finger back to the starting point.
3. Pause for a moment of think time before asking students “What word?” and side-slash to the end of the word.

Time Depends on number of new words and difficulty level. Kindergarten students often work on this skill for 5 minutes each day. First-grade students may need to work on this skill for up to 20 minutes if the curriculum has introduced many new words or a new letter–sound pattern.

Instructions

**Teacher**

1. Advance Organizer

2. My Turn
   (finger to the left of the first letter) “My turn sounding out this word in my head.” (loop from letter to letter and silently mouth the letter sounds /f/-/a/-/n/) (loop back to starting point) “What word?” (side-slash signal) “fan.”

3. Together
   The teacher answers with students this time:
   (finger to the left of the first letter) “Together, sound out this word in your heads.” (loop from letter to letter and silently mouth the letter sounds /f/-/a/-/n/) (loop back to starting point) “What word?” (side-slash signal) “fan.” (loop to starting point) “Yes, fan.”

4. Your Turn
   (finger to the left of the first letter) “Your turn. Sound out this word in your heads.” (loop from letter to letter) (students mouth sounds) (loop back to starting point) “What word?” (side-slash signal) (answer) (loop to starting point) “Yes, fan.”

5. Individual Student Checkout
   (finger to the left of the first letter) “Individual turns. Sound out this word in your head. Maria.” (loop from letter to letter) (student mouths sounds) (loop back to starting point) “What word?” (side-slash signal) (answer) (loop to starting point) “Yes, fan.” Call on several individual students to check for accuracy.

6. Read the Row: Reading the row of words the fast way.
   Note: If you provide three seconds of think time before signaling for an answer, students should be ready to read the row of words the fast way. Use the Part 3 format for this section:
   “Let’s read all four words the fast way this time.”
   (think time) “What word?” (side-slash signal) (answer) (loop to starting point) “Yes, fan.”
   (think time) “What word?” (side-slash signal) (answer) (loop to starting point) “Yes, sip.”
   (think time) “What word?” (side-slash signal) (answer) (loop to starting point) “Yes, let.”
   (think time) “What word?” (side-slash signal) (answer) (loop to starting point) “Yes, cat.”

Be sure to move to using mainly Your Turns as soon as possible.
When students are subvocally sounding out new words accurately with teacher support, start teaching at Step 4. Continue to use the entire My Turn–Together–Your Turn sequence for difficult new words.

When her students became more proficient at subvocally sounding-out, Ms. Elizondo again faded out the My Turn and Together steps and started teaching at Step 4, Your Turn. She continued to use the entire My Turn–Together–Your Turn sequence for difficult new words.

Once students can subvocally sound out words without help, add Part 3, reading words the fast way, to your daily regular word reading. As her students moved through Part 2 reading and were able to subvocally sound out words accurately, without added teacher support, Ms. Elizondo added Part 3, reading words the fast way, to her daily instruction in reading regular words. It was at this point that Ms. Elizondo noticed that her students’ DIBELS scores were beginning to approach 30, the point at which they could read word lists the fast way, using sounding-out only for more difficult words or for making error corrections.

Part 3: Reading Words the Fast Way  Once students are able to sound out words in their heads accurately, add Part 3 to your daily teaching, which is reading words the “fast way,” a term used by Carnine and colleagues (2004) to represent sounding-out at an automatic level. It is important to make a distinction here between what is called reading the “fast way” and another frequently used term, sight reading. While interpretations of the meaning of sight reading vary, a common implication drawn from the term is that the words have been memorized first rather than sounded out. For the purposes of this text, “reading the fast way” is preferred, because, except for irregular words that can’t be sounded out, reading the fast way is preceded by sounding-out, not memorization. When this part of reading regular words is introduced into your daily word reading exercises, students are beginning to say the words without pausing to sound out, because the process is becoming automatic. Table 3.7 describes Part 3, the format for teaching students to read words the fast way. When your students’ DIBELS NWF scores are at 30 and above, they are beginning to see words in chunks, rather than as individual sounds. You can detect this when you notice that your students are reading at the onset-rime stage on their DIBELS NWF (starting to read dov as dov rather than as do v). They may also be reading the nonsense

Source: This script is based on one originally developed and field tested by Carnine, Silbert, Kame’enui, and Tarver, (2004). Direct Instruction Reading (4th ed.). New Jersey, Merrill Prentice Hall.
Chapter 3

TABLE 3.7  Format for Reading Regular Words—Part 3: The Fast Way

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>After seeing a regular word, students orally read the word the fast way.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials Needed</td>
<td>Board, chart paper, or overhead transparency and writing implement. Write the regular words that students will read in rows on the board. For example, if students are reading eight words, write two rows of four words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signaling</td>
<td>Finger is in starting position to the left of the word. “What word” initiates the side-slash signal for unison answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Depends on number of new words and difficulty level. First grade students may need to work on this skill for up to 20 minutes if the curriculum has introduced many new words or a new letter-sound pattern. Older students with alphabetic principle may only have a few new one-syllable words that are appropriate for this format.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Instructions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Advance Organizer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My Turn (use for first word only, and only for the first day or two using this format) (finger to the left of the first letter) “My turn to read this word the fast way?” (side-slash signal) “fan.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Your Turn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(point and pause) “What word?” (side-slash answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, fan.”</td>
<td>fan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(point and pause) “What word?” (side-slash answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, hat.”</td>
<td>hat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(point and pause) “What word?” (side-slash answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, sit.”</td>
<td>sit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(point and pause) “What word?” (side-slash answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, Pam.”</td>
<td>Pam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Individual Student Checkout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(point and pause) “Individual turns. What word? Ali.” (side-slash answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, fan.”</td>
<td>fan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(point and pause) “What word? Toni.” (side-slash answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, sit.”</td>
<td>sit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call on several individual students to check for accuracy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Error Correction

If students make an error, immediately return to Part 1 sounding-out aloud using a My Turn–Together–Your Turn pattern. Then return to the beginning of the row and have students reread words the fast way.

### Perk up Your Drill

- Tell students that words they read correctly will go in their weekly dictionaries taken home to parents. Create a sense of drama about the large number of words that are going into the dictionary.
- Ask a student to lead the drill, signaling just as you do.

### Adaptations

- Many students who are at risk will not automatically know common vocabulary such as snap, pal, or tap. Connecting words to their usage or meaning will help students remember them while expanding their vocabulary. After students read a word for which they don’t know the meaning, some teachers will connect the word to its meaning and use the word in a brief sentence, saying the key word louder for emphasis. “A pal is a friend. In our story yesterday, Big Bear’s pal was mouse.”

Source: This script is based on one originally developed and field tested by Carnine, Silbert, Kame’enui, and Tarver, (2004). Direct Instruction Reading (4th ed.). New Jersey, Merrill Prentice Hall.
words slowly, but as whole words. When students reach this point, use Part 3 exclusively for their daily regular word reading, except for particularly difficult words or when correcting student errors.

The signaling procedure for reading the fast way consists of touching to the left of the word, providing a thinking pause, saying, “What word?”, and then giving the side slash signal. Tips for teaching students to read words the fast way are as follows.


Use assessment information to guide teaching. Every morning, Ms. Elizondo wrote the new words from the daily lesson on the board and presented a brief advance organizer, telling her students that first they would read words that would later appear in the new elephant story. Since almost everyone in her class had scored 50 or higher on the DIBELS NWF Assessment, she only used Part 3 for her regular word reading unless the story had a particularly difficult word that needed to be sounded out or when her students made errors.

Gradually decrease your think time. Ms. Elizondo knew that think time was critical during this stage of reading. The first time students read through the word list, Mrs. Elizondo paused for three seconds after asking, “What word,” before giving the signal to read the word. This longer think time increased her students’ success reading the words the first time. The second time she went through the list, she paused for only one or two seconds of think time.

Only begin with a My Turn when first introducing the Part 3 format. Because Ms. Elizondo’s students already understood what reading words the fast way meant, she skipped the My Turns in Steps 1 and 2, and began her Part 3 word reading with a Your Turn using Step 3.

Preplan by using the optional step for difficult words. To prevent errors when a difficult new word was on the list, Ms. Elizondo used the “optional step” and asked students first to orally sound out the difficult word. For example, when /str/ was introduced in the new lesson, she returned to a My Turn–Together–Your Turn Part 1 sounding-out pattern to show students how to apply the new letter sounds to strum, stream, and strict. She knew that whenever students make errors reading a word, it takes much longer for them to learn it.

Use assessment information to determine individual turns. As always, Ms. Elizondo gave students who received the lowest scores on the DIBELS NWF assessment more turns during individual student checkouts.

The process of helping students attain the alphabetic principle is critical, but important decisions about when to use which of the three word-reading formats, and with which students, can be complicated. A chart of how to match your students with the appropriate formats based on their scores on the DIBELS NWF measure is shown in Figure 3.13.

Writing Regular Words

Students benefit when they are writing or spelling the same regular words that they are learning to sound out and read. For example, Mr. Drake’s students sounded out the following words in their daily lesson: man, rap, top, pat, stop, and grab. He then asked his students to spell each of these words using the format shown in Figure 3.14.
FIGURE 3.13  Reading Words: Use NWF Scores to Match Students with Formats
Reading Sight Words

Reading connected text, even when most of the words can be sounded out, requires recognition of the most frequently used sight words. For the purposes of this text, a sight word is defined as a word that either contains letters that don’t say their most common sounds or letters that have yet to be taught to students in isolation. For example, the word *said* is irregular because the letters *a* and *i* do not represent their most common sounds.

**FIGURE 3.14 Regular Word Spelling Format**


### Spelling activity: Students write *in, pin, pat.*

**Teacher:** “You’re going to write the word *in.* Listen. *In.* Say the sounds in *in.*”

Signal for each sound by using a fingersnap, clap, or extended finger as the children say /i/ /i/ /i/ (pause) /n/ /n/ /n/. Repeat until firm.

**Teacher:** “Everybody, write the word (pause) *in.*”

Check children’s answers so you can give feedback.

Repeat for *pin,* and *pat.*

### Reading Sight Words

Reading connected text, even when most of the words can be sounded out, requires recognition of the most frequently used sight words. For the purposes of this text, a sight word is defined as a word that either contains letters that don’t say their most common sounds or letters that have yet to be taught to students in isolation. For example, the word *said* is irregular because the letters *a* and *i* do not represent their most common sounds. The

### Bridging the Gap

**Which Is the Best Way to Teach Beginning Readers?**

Should I start instruction by teaching students to blend individual letter-sounds into words, or start with larger units or word-families and have students use them to read words?

Two of the most common beginning phonics approaches are letter–sound blending and word-family instruction (Wanzek & Hagger, 2003). In letter–sound blending, students are first taught the most common sounds of letters in isolation and are then taught to blend them into words. This is the approach used in this text that is referred to as synthetic phonics. For example, Mr. Ellis taught his students to identify the sounds /m/, /s/, /t/, and /a/ in isolation. Once these letter sounds were learned, and his students could orally segment and blend, Mr. Ellis taught them to read words such as *Sam, sat,* and *mast.* Another beginning phonics approach starts by using larger units of sounds such as word families. In this approach, called analogizing, students are typically taught a rime pattern and then taught to use that known word part to form new words. For example, Ms. Calhoun taught her students to read the rime /am/. She then taught her students to read related words such as *Sam, ham, mam,* and so on.

The National Reading Panel (1990) found that both letter–sound blending and analogizing were effective in teaching beginning word-reading to students. Which of these approaches should teachers use with their students who are at risk? Wanzek and Hagger (2003) suggest that both be used, with letter–sound blending coming first because it is a necessary preskill for word reading, and word-family instruction next because it helps students better generalize their decoding skills to more complex words. Once students have alphabetic principle, Wanzek and Hagger (2003) suggest the following guidelines for teaching analogizing.

- Select rimes that consist of previously taught letter-sound correspondences or letter combinations.
- Select words that progress from simple onsets (*man*), then blends (*Stan*), then multisyllable words (*panel*).
- Provide opportunities for students to find similar patterns in words and teach them to use words they know to read other words (p. 36).
TABLE 3.8  Format for Reading Sight Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>After seeing a sight word, students orally read the word the fast way.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials Needed</td>
<td>Board, chart paper, or overhead transparency and writing implement. Teacher writes the new sight words in a column. The review sight words are written in another column.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signaling</td>
<td>Two-part signal: “What word?” or “Spell _____” initiates the signal for unison answers. 1. After asking “What word?” use a side-slash signal and after students answer, loop back to the starting point before affirming the answer. 2. After saying “Spell _____,” point under each letter as students spell the word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>3–5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Advance Organizer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Write the new sight words from the daily story in a column on the left side of the board: for example, today, father, strange. Write four review sight words in a column on the right side of the board: for example, was, isn’t, should, great. Teach the first new sight word written on the board (today).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. (finger to the left of the first letter) “This word is” (side-slash while saying “today!”) (loop back to starting point)</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. “What word?” (side-slash-answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, today.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. “Spell today.” (point to each letter as students answer) (loop back to starting point)</td>
<td>t-o-d-a-y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. “What word?” (side-slash-answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, today.”</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. (finger to the left of the first letter) “This word is” (side-slash while saying “father!”) (loop back to starting point)</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. “What word?” (side-slash-answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, father.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. “Spell father.” (point to each letter as students answer) (loop back to starting point)</td>
<td>f-a-t-h-e-r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. “What word?” (side-slash-answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, father.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Return to the top of the list and point to the left of the first word. Pause and ask, “What word?” (side-slash-answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, today.” Quickly point to the left of the second word. Pause and ask, “What word?” (side-slash-answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, father.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Repeat steps e–i with the remaining words until students can read all of the words in the column without errors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Individual Student Checkout: Call on between one and three students to check for accuracy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2: Students sight read new words and review words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Point to words randomly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. “When I signal, read the word.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(finger to the left of the first letter) “What word?” (side-slash-answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, father.”</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(finger to the left of the first letter) “What word?” (side-slash-answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, was.”</td>
<td>was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(finger to the left of the first letter) “What word?” (side-slash-answer) (loop back to starting point) “Yes, should.”</td>
<td>should</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Individual Student Checkout: Call on between one and three students to check for accuracy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
word *chin* would be irregular if students had yet to learn the /ch/ sound. Students who are at risk or who have disabilities need extra practice learning sight words, especially before the alphabetic principle has been established. When a new sight word is introduced, students are first told what the word is and are asked to repeat it. The students then spell the word as the teacher points to each individual letter. Lastly, the students say the word again. Requiring that students spell the word reinforces the important idea that even for words that can't be sounded, it is still important to look at all the letters of a word in a left-to-right sequence. Once sight words are introduced, they are thereafter read the fast way unless there is an error. In that case, the teacher returns to a My Turn, supplying the word and asking students to spell it, just as if the word was being introduced for the first time. The format for introducing sight words is shown in Table 3.8.

**Two Tips for Teaching Sight Words** Try these two strategies to enhance your teaching of sight words:

**Use thinking pauses to build student fluency in reading new sight words.** During Part 1, when first introducing the word, use longer think time and pause for 3 seconds before asking, “What word?” During Part 2, only pause for 1 or 2 seconds to build student fluency.

**Avoid teaching similar sight words together, such as *where* and *were.*** Include similar sight words together only after students can automatically read each individual word when it is presented by itself.

**Reading Decodable Sentences**

Once students can sound out a number of regular words and know a few sight words, you can begin reading sentences. Sentence reading provides a good opportunity to explicitly teach students to read connected text. Using this format, students quickly learn to follow a line of print, recognize that spaces mark boundaries between words, automatically move from left to right, read word-by-word, recognize that sentences are composed of words, and recognize final punctuation marks. If your students' DIBELS NWF scores are under 30 and they are still learning new words by orally or subvocally sounding them out before reading

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**TABLE 3.8 Continued**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error Correction</th>
<th>If students make an error, immediately return to a My Turn. Tell students the word, ask them to spell the word, and then ask them to read the sight word (Part 1: Steps a–d).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perk up Your Drill</td>
<td>- On the last section of the sight word script (Part 2), tell students that you will erase every word they read correctly. The goal is to have all words erased on the first read-through.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- If you are working with a smaller group, you can write each sight word on a large card to hold up. Construct a “we know that” box and on the last section of the sight word script (Part 2), dramatically throw each word that students read correctly into the box.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptations</td>
<td>- Many students who are at risk will not automatically put sight words such as <em>was, where, should,</em> and <em>couldn’t</em> into context unless you briefly add that component at the start. Connecting words to their usage or meaning will help students remember them while expanding their vocabulary. The first time they introduce a new sight word, some teachers will use the sight word in a brief sentence, saying the sight word louder for emphasis, “<em>This word is should.</em>” Your mom says, “<em>It’s late and you should go to bed.</em>” Later in the lesson, if students make an error, the teacher will use another sentence to connect the word to its meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** This script is based on one originally developed and field tested by Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, and Tarver, (2004). *Direct Instruction Reading* (4th ed.). New Jersey, Merrill Prentice Hall.
Bridging the Gap

Can I Still Use My Word Wall?

A Word Wall is a group of high-frequency written words displayed in alphabetical order on a bulletin board or a section of a classroom wall. The purpose of the wall is to make the words accessible so that students can find them when reading and writing and teachers can readily focus on them when providing practice in class (Cunningham, 2000). The Word Wall gives children extra practice reading, writing, and understanding the meaning of high-frequency regular words and sight words. This purpose is consistent with the objectives of the phonics approach described in this text. In addition, the “chanting” often used when reading from the Word Wall is very similar to the unison response formats used here. Problems with the Word Wall can occur when the words on the wall are not decodable; that is, they include regular words containing untaught sounds, untaught words, or too many irregular words. Here are four keys to using the Word Wall effectively with students who are at risk.

1. Only select regular words that contain sounds that have already been taught.
2. Select only irregular words that have already been taught.
3. For every five regular words, select one irregular word.
4. When asking your students to read the words, use teaching strategies that discourage student guessing. For example, have students sound out the regular words while they are chanting, rather than having them sight read the words. Try putting regular and irregular words in a separate color. Use signals so everyone answers together. Calibrate your think time for students’ reading ability.

Seize the Teachable Moment

A Dozen Creative Suggestions

Killer Word Boost

If your class has a “killer word” for the week, wear a scarf one day and tape the difficult word on the scarf or pin the word to your lapel. Students’ eyes will alight on the word every time they look at you. Tell students you will try to trick them throughout the day by asking them to read the word at moments when they least expect that question.

Beat the Clock

If you routinely write all new sight words on large cards, you can pull these cards out when your class is waiting to get their pictures taken or go to an assembly and you have 5 minutes to fill. Each new word should be written on three cards to play this game. Select a set of irregular words that students have already learned to correctly identify for the game (for example, through, beautiful, where, enough, though). Your goal is getting students to recognize these words more fluently.

- Include multiple cards of each word in the card deck.
- Set a goal such as 25 words correct per minute. Tell the students that you will play a game with them and that their goal is to correctly read at least 25 word cards in 1 minute.
- Start the timer or have an appointed student start it.
- Hold up the first word card so that all students can answer in unison.
- Provide quick corrective feedback whenever students make errors (“This word is because.”)
- Continue presenting words until the timer rings.
- Words that are correctly identified go in the throwaway box.
- Words that are read incorrectly go in a pile next to you.
- At the end of 1 minute, count the number of words correct and let the class know whether they met the goal.
- Pick up the cards in the pile and review errors with the students before repeating the activity for another minute.
the whole word (Tables 3.5–3.6), use those same formats during sentence reading. When students come to a sight word, have them read it as a whole word.

Your students will quickly start reading the sentences in unison, but expect that the first few times, your pace will slow as you teach students to follow the signals when reading an entire sentence. If you maintain high expectations for students to read together, they will quickly adopt the habit during this part of instruction. If you do not start with a clear signal for each word (“What word?”), your best readers who do not need as much think time will jump ahead with the word and students who need an extra second or two will soon stop trying and coast by echoing the faster readers. You will be fooled into thinking that students are fluently reading, when in reality, three or four of the best readers are doing all the work for the rest of the class.

The curriculum that Ms. Elizondo was using in her class introduced sentence reading by the middle of September, so she wrote two or three sentences on the board each day underneath the reading words. When her students were still sounding out words (DIBELS NWF < 30), she had them sound out each word before reading it in the sentence: “Sound out.” “What word?”; “Sound out.” “What word?”; “Sound out.” “What word?” If she didn’t have students sound out the words on the first read, some students would not be able to apply their decoding skills. Although she sometimes felt like a broken record signaling across the sentence, she knew that with enough practice, the students would soon move into reading words the fast way. Then they would also start reading their sentences without sounding out each word. By the third time students read each sentence, Ms. Elizondo had students read the sentences the fast way using normal intonation.

Reading Decodable Passages–Preadalphabetic Principle

Dr. Reid Lyon explains, “The average child needs between four and fourteen exposures to automatize the recognition of a new word. Therefore, in learning to read it is vital that children read a large amount of text at their independent reading level (95% accuracy) and that the text format provides specific practice in the skills being learned” (Lyon, 1998, p. 6). Students who are at risk often need even more opportunities to practice reading books that contain the words they have learned in class. One important component of explicit, systematic phonics instruction is the use of decodable books for passage-reading activities. Decodable books contain a high percentage of regular words comprised of sounds the students have learned plus a few high-frequency sight words. For example, Ms. Rodriguez’s students had learned the most common sounds for s, c, n, a, r, t, l, b, and i. They also learned the sight words the, a, said, were, to, and is. The following sentence represents decodable text for her students:

Bill ran to the bin.

The students would be able to sound out the regular words Bill, ran, and bin, and read the sight or irregular words to and the.

The following sentence, while including high-frequency words, would not be decodable for the same group of students:

Come here, Bob.

In this sentence the sight words come and here haven’t been learned yet. Students have also not learned the most common sound of the letter /o/ and would not be able to sound out the word Bob. This sentence is not decodable. For information on how to select decodable books for your students, see the feature on decodable books later in this chapter.

During the first half of first grade, before students typically score 50 on the DIBELS NWF Assessment, the teacher has students read in unison so they get the most practice
Pre Alphabetic Principle < 30 on NWF

First Time Through Story

Table 3.9 “First Reading” sounding out loud

If 97% accurate

Second Time Through Story

Table 3.9 “Second Reading” silently sounding out each word

If 97% accurate

Third Time Through Story

Table 3.9 “Third Reading” reading words the fast way

Connect to Comprehension

Pre Alphabetic Principle 30–49 on NWF

First Time Through Story

Table 3.9 “Third Reading” reading words the fast way

Second Time Through Story

Table 3.9 “Third Reading”—faster

Third Time Through Story

Table 3.9 “Third Reading” (faster) and/or Table 5.4 SAFER reading

Connect to Comprehension

FIGURE 3.15a  Passage Reading: Use NWF Scores to Match Students with Formats

possible on sounding out and reading regular words, the heart of the alphabetic principle. When students are explicitly taught to read connected text, they quickly learn to follow a line of print, to recognize that spaces mark boundaries between words, to automatically move from left to right, to read word by word, to recognize that sentences are composed of words, and to recognize final punctuation marks. Figures 3.15a and b will help you decide which format a student needs, based on the DIBELS NWF score.
The actual steps of the format are described in Table 3.9 (pp. 108–109). For students whose scores on the DIBELS NWF are less than 30, the teacher uses all three readings described in the format, as follows. On the first reading the students sound out all words in unison except for sight words, which are read by the group as whole words. The teacher moves to the second reading when the first reading is performed with at least 97% accuracy. If students read below 97% accuracy, they sound out the story again, orally. During the second reading, the students subvocally sound out each word in the decodable text before saying it. For the third reading, students read each word in unison the fast way. If the teacher has selected a book that matches the students’ word reading skills, this third reading is usually done accurately the first time through. As was done with the first reading, the second and third readings are repeated if performed with less than 97% accuracy. Check comprehension on the third reading.

You learned earlier that students whose scores on DIBELS NWF are between 30 and 49 are reading whole words in their list reading. Therefore, their passage reading begins with the third reading on Table 3.9, reading words the fast way in unison. The students read the story through two times in unison as a group, reading each word the fast way, with the teacher building fluency by gradually decreasing the thinking time required over the course of the two readings. If students perform fluently with 97% accuracy the second time through, take individual turns, with each student reading one sentence each. Check comprehension during this third reading. Once students reach benchmark levels on DIBELS NWF, they are ready to read stories in a more traditional fashion by taking individual turns as described in the SAFER oral-passage-reading format in Chapter 5 (see Table 5.4, p. 184).

**Tips for the Transition from Words to Passages**

A few tips will help you successfully move from word-reading to decodable-passage reading.

1. Although your students will quickly start reading the sentences in unison, expect that the first few times your pace will slow as you teach students to follow the signals while they follow with their fingers and turn pages of the book.
TABLE 3.9 Format for Reading Stories in the Curriculum and Decodable Books: Pre-Alphabetic Principle

| Outcome | Students who have scored less than 30 letter sounds per minute on the DIBELS NWF assessment will read a book containing words or word patterns taught in class, sounding out the words before reading them with 100% accuracy. Students who score between 30 and 49 on DIBELS NWF will read words the fast way using the procedures described in the third reading. |
| Materials Needed | Use decodable text or text containing regular and sight words that the students are capable of reading with at least 90% accuracy. |
| Signaling | Finger snap or hand clap. “What word?” initiates the signal for unison answer. |
| Time | Between 15 and 30 minutes |

**Instructions**

**Advance Organizer**

**Steps to reading stories and books (Pre-Alphabetic Principle):**

**First Reading(s)**

1. Suggested wording for focusing students to follow along: *“We are first going to sound out each word and then we will read it the fast way. When I clap, say the sound of the first letter. When I clap again, move your finger and say the next sound. When you are at the end of the word, move your finger back to the beginning of the word so you can read it the fast way. Watch me do it first.”* (You will need to use a finger snap with your nondominant hand as you show students how you follow along to the signal, sounding out and reading the words.) *“Everybody, put your finger under the first letter of the very first word.”*

2. Focus students to accurate reading and tell them the goal you’ve set: *“Our goal is to miss no more than one word today.”*

3. First Story Reading—Sounding-Out: Pause 1 second and then say, *“Sound it out”* and clap for the first sound. After 1 to 1½ seconds, clap for the next sound. After 1 to 1½ seconds later clap for the last sound. When students have said the last sound correctly, make sure that they move their finger back to the left of the word. Ask *“What word?”* and clap. Students side-slash their finger as they read the word the fast way. Then they immediately move their finger to the left of the next word.

4. Pause 1 second and then say *“Sound it out”* and clap for the first sound. After 1 to 1½ seconds, clap for the next sound. After 1 to 1½ seconds later clap for the last sound. When students have said the last sound correctly, make sure that they move their finger back to the left of the word. Ask *“What word?”* and clap. Students side-slash their finger as they read the word the fast way. Then they immediately move their finger to the left of the next word.

5. For sight words, avoid sounding out. When students move their fingers to the left of a sight word, say, *“What word?”* and clap to signal students to say the word.

6. Continue using this format to the end of the story or to the end of the page.

7. Wrap Up: Have students reread the story, sounding out each word until the error limit is met. When the error limit is met give individual turns. Do not move on to the second reading format until the error limit is met.
2. Take time to teach students how to follow the text with the pointer finger of their
dominant hand. When students are following along with their fingers, whether read-
ing in unison or when another child is reading, you know they are paying atten-
tion. Since consistently following the text will be difficult for your most inattentive
students, provide an incentive in the beginning for consistent finger pointing: “The
class just earned another point because everyone remembered to follow with their
fingers.”
3. Some teachers will clarify key vocabulary when students first read words they do not know during the first read-through. Other teachers focus exclusively on sounding out words or reading during a first read and will wait until the second reading to ask comprehension questions and discuss vocabulary. Other teachers pre-teach the meaning of vocabulary words that they anticipate the children will not know. Chapter 6 will discuss strategies to teach vocabulary explicitly.

Selecting Decodable Books

The role of decodable books in beginning reading instruction remains one of the most contentious topics between phonics reading educators and literature-based reading educators. (See Bridging the Gap: Should I Use Predictable Books? on p. 113.) Unfortunately, the National Reading Panel Report provides no direct guidance and instead recommends that more research is needed to investigate this question (National Reading Panel, 2000). Meanwhile, since most explicit and systematic phonics curricula use decodable texts as a key part of beginning reading instruction, teachers of students who are at risk need to familiarize themselves with decodable materials and investigate the issues for themselves.

Why are decodable books such an integral component of so many systematic and explicit phonics programs? First, decodable books provide more practice opportunities for students who are learning to decode letter–sound patterns. As noted earlier in this chapter, the average child needs between 4 and 14 exposures to a new pattern before it is identified automatically. Students who are at risk are likely to need even more exposure. After Mr. Jerry's class successfully read the list of words starting with st, tr, and d consonant blends, he wanted to give his students more practice reading these same words in connected text. He knew that if the next story his students read contained only one or two words beginning with these new consonant blends, many students would not get enough practice and would be unable to identify the pattern successfully when it appeared in next week's story. For these early readers, albeit for a relatively short period of time, decodable books serve as "a bridge between phonics instruction and the reading of trade books" (Moats, 2000, p. 148).
Because decodable books incorporate words or sounds that students have already learned in class, students typically are highly successful reading decodable books even for the first time. Historically, many students who are at risk or have disabilities have experienced such high levels of failure while learning to read that by third grade they have already developed negative attitudes toward reading. By providing students with the opportunity to read successfully on their own, decodable books can help students develop confidence and a more positive attitude toward reading (Bursuck et al., 2004; Stanovich, 1993/1994).

When students are at the pre-alphabetic reading stage, most comprehension instruction is done through listening and discussing different genres of children's literature. If used correctly, decodable books can also provide opportunities for comprehension development. A creative teacher can draw out several questions even from a short decodable story. For example, after reading the decodable book *Frank the Fish Gets His Wish*, Mr. Jerry had his students identify main characters, explain why Frank was lonely, sequence events in the story, visualize how they would feel if they were the fish, and talk about the fantasy aspects of the book. When students reread the story the second time, they used fish voices and tried to express fear when knocked out of their fishbowl.

Teachers selecting supplementary decodable books need to systematically match the sequence of letter sounds and word patterns taught in their classroom with text in decodable books. Because some books selling as decodables include a relatively high percentage of sight words, teachers cannot assume that a book labeled as such is decodable. Put simply, many books advertised as decodables frequently are not. Table 3.10 lists a common sequence of increasingly difficult words that you can use as a guide for selecting decodable books.

When selecting additional books, consider these questions:
- Are the students beginning readers and able to follow only one or two lines of text on a page?
- Do flashy pictures interrupt the students’ concentration when sounding out the words?
- Are the students older readers who need a decodable chapter book with fewer pictures?
- Are full pages of text needed because the students are ready to transition to chapter books?
- What letter sounds and types of words have the students learned to decode? What sight words do students know? Does this book match their skills?

| Table 3.10  Selecting Decodable Books Based on Word Difficulty |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| **Skill** | **Examples** |
| VC and CVC words that begin with continuous sounds | it, fan |
| VCC and CVCC words that begin with a continuous sound | lamp, ask |
| CVC words that begin with a stop sound | cup, tin |
| CVCC words that begin with a stop sound | dust, hand |
| CCVC words | crib, blend, snap, flat |
| CCVCC, CCCVC, and CCCVCC words | clamp, spent, scrap, scrimp |
| Long vowels and short vowel combinations | late, stand, stay, Pam |

For specific information about how to teach decoding and use decodable readers, visit the Teaching Decoding website: [www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/spring_sum98/moats.pdf](http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/spring_sum98/moats.pdf).
Chapter 3

Putting the Pieces Together: What Does Instruction Look Like for Tier 1 and Tier 2 Students?

Kindergarten

Every morning after circle time, Mr. Hicks uses the formats in Chapter 1 to teach his students how to blend onset-rime. As part of his advance organizer, he tells students that first they will blend some words together, then they will learn a new letter that they make with their
Alphabetic Principle

**First Grade**

Ms. Matizza likes to begin reading right after morning announcements when her students are at a higher energy level. When she made her lessons plans last Friday, Ms. Matizza went lips together, and finally they will practice all of the letter sounds that they have learned. After 5 minutes of blending practice, he introduces the new letter for the week, /m/, by reading a mouse poem in the teacher’s manual. After the poem, he asks everyone to put their lips together and make the /m/ sound. He individually calls on Jenny and Roxanne, who have speech difficulties, so he can check to see whether they are saying the correct sound. Jenny is articulating an /n/ so he instructs her to put her finger on her lips and press them together. Now she can make the sound. Next he directs all of the students’ attention to the two mountains in the letter /m/. Finally, he is ready to use the letter–sound script and practice Part A. After students seem firm with saying /m/, he moves to Part B of the script and reviews the six letters learned in the past six weeks. Using a long pointer, Mr. Hicks asks everyone to say the letter sounds when he gives the signal. Since his students did not make any mistakes yesterday, he exaggerates his quick pointing from letter to letter, pretending that he is out of breath trying to keep up with them. The children enjoy making Mr. Hicks tired. Since every day his students write the new letter sound after saying it, he takes them through a 2-minute stretch break before asking them to return to their desks for writing practice.

**Bridging the Gap**

**Should I Use Predictable Books?**

Problem readers often overuse the context to recognize unknown words. For example, students with reading problems tend to guess when they come to a word they don’t know by using the context (“What word makes sense?”) or by looking at the first letter of a word (“This word begins with sss”). Research shows that content words, those that are most important for text comprehension, can be predicted from the surrounding text only 10 to 20% of the time (Gough et al., 1981). Predictable books are designed to make guessing pay off, giving students the idea that they don’t have to look at all parts of words when figuring them out. Students who are at risk need to develop a consistent sounding strategy before they are taught to use the context. This means that their early reading experiences should involve as little guessing as possible. If students are required to sound out words in one setting and guess in another, they are likely to be confused and may not learn a systematic sounding strategy altogether. Therefore, the use of predictable books with students who have yet to attain the alphabetic principle is not recommended. Decodable text based on the sounds the students are learning is much more likely to result in a strategic reader as opposed to a guesser.

If you must use predictable texts:

1. Avoid having students reread the texts if they are beginning to memorize the story.
2. Prior to reading the story, circle words that students can decode (either a regular word for which they know the sounds or a sight word). As you read the story, students can be responsible for reading the decodable words. If decodable words are missed, make sure you use sounding out as part of your correction procedure.
3. Occasionally model sounding out when reading predictable texts. Through your example, students see that reading is not all memorization.

Divide your class into two groups. Use predictable books with the higher groups and decodable books with your students who are below the DIBELS benchmarks.
through the reading curriculum teaching guide so that she knew all of the letter sounds, words, sentences, and stories for the week. Before students came in the room, Ms. Matizza wrote all of the letter sounds students would practice on one section of the board, all of the new words on another section of the board, and three sentences on the third section. Before class begins, four students leave to go to their intensive Tier 3 reading class. Ms. Matizza is pleased that these students have started to read two-phoneme words, although they still are blending at a slow rate and have only learned a few letter sounds.

When class starts, students know the letter sounds so well that after 2 minutes, Ms. Matizza moves on to the words. This part of the lesson moves more slowly, because most of her students do not have alphabetic principle and first need to sound out each word before saying it. She frequently calls on students in Tier 2, since they need more practice. Mr. Matizza draws a candle next to each row after students quickly read all the words in the row. Her students enjoy having her say that “It's a four-candle day” whenever they have fluently read every word. Sentence reading moves much more quickly, because students have already learned the words in the sentences. Everyone likes to read the question sentence, making their voice intonation rise at the end.

Ms. Matizza prefers conducting reading group on the carpet, so she asks her students to move to their circle. Two class helpers pass out the reading books about a swamp, and everyone turns to the first page, reading fingers ready. Because this is a new book and the *ir*, *er*, and *ur* words are more difficult, Ms. Matizza only plans to get through half of the book, saving the rest for tomorrow. The first time through the story, Ms. Matizza uses a unison response and has the group sound out the regular words in the story together. Ms. Matizza signals for every sound using a clap and then claps for the whole word. When the students come to a sight word, Ms. Matizza does not have them sound it out. She asks, “What word?” and then claps for them to say the whole word. By the second time through the story, students, with a little bit of think time, can say whole words without sounding them out first. In the middle of the reading group the students in Tier 3 return to class, take a book, and turn to the page everyone else is reading. Although still unable to read the words, they are able to stay on the same page as the rest of the class. During the third read-through, Ms. Matizza calls on two of the Tier 3 students to answer comprehension questions. After the story is finished, Ms. Matizza has everyone return to their desks to draw the water-soaked swamp land.

How Can I Help Students Who Still Can’t Identify Letter Sounds or Read Regular Words or Longer Decodable Passages?

Students’ scores on the letter–sound assessment let you know who needs extra Tier 2 booster practice reviewing those sounds. Student scores on the DIBELS NWF assessment inform you who needs extra Tier 2 booster practice with decoding skills. Booster sessions vary, depending on whether students are just working on letter sounds or are also learning to decode.

For students just learning letter sounds in kindergarten, small-group booster sessions last between 5 and 10 minutes. Students whose letter–sound assessment indicates that they know fewer than 90% of the letter sounds taught by the teacher should start booster practice immediately, so that they don’t fall too far behind the class. Because many kindergarten students who need letter sound practice also need phonemic awareness boosters, you can combine the two skills into one short practice session. During the booster group, practice with the same letter–sound format (Table 3.4) that was used during large-
group Tier 1 instruction. Each day students practice one letter, continuing to practice that same letter each day until mastery. The class may have learned sounds for the following letters, s, t, a, m, f, b, i, and l, but if Keivon does not know the sounds for f, b, and l, the teacher has him identify the sound of f every day until he knows it. Each day she also reviews the sounds he knows. After Keivon learns the sound for f, she begins working on the sound for b. Teaching more than one letter sound at a time to students who are not keeping up with the pace of the class is not effective because it is likely to be confusing.

Students learning to blend sounds into words need longer daily 30-minute booster sessions in which they can practice new letter sounds, regular and sight words, and passage reading. Some first-grade teachers like to schedule the boosters before reading class, so that the students in Tier 2 who just practiced the material can participate more fully with the class. Other first-grade teachers prefer to schedule booster practice just after lunch. These teachers like to have the students’ practice spaced so that there are morning and afternoon practice sessions. Since beginning decoding Tier 2 booster sessions last longer, some schools elect to have another teacher or trained paraprofessional work with each small group, taking them to a relatively quiet location. Although small groups of three students are ideal, some schools with many students who are at risk do not have enough personnel for such small groups. In our project schools we found that having six or fewer students in each booster group worked well. Booster groups at our three schools were taught by a music teacher, a French teacher, a Spanish teacher, a former Reading Recovery teacher, a librarian, a special education teacher, a Title 1 teacher, or a paraprofessional. Each of these individuals first learned to teach the same scripts used by the classroom teacher so that they used the same signals and followed the same formats.

Some booster groups are able to keep up with the pace of the classroom and practice the same skills and words that were taught in class. Other booster groups fall behind when difficult new patterns such as ch are introduced. These groups continue to practice the earlier lessons until they have success. Because booster teachers can only fit in letter–sound practice, regular word reading, sight word reading, and sentence reading into the 30-minute sessions, often there isn’t enough time for reading the longer decodable book. Some school teams will use tutors or paraprofessionals to provide additional time for Tier 2 students to read more decodable text.

What Can I Do for Students When Daily Tier 2 Booster Sessions Aren’t Working?

In Chapter 2, the need for more intensive Tier 3 instruction for some students in kindergarten who are particularly at risk was discussed, and decision rules were provided to help you identify those students. However, not all students who need Tier 3 enter in kindergarten. Some enter in grade 1, as well. Later placements into Tier 3 can occur for a number of reasons. Some students manage to acquire enough segmenting, blending, and letter–sound skills to remain in Tier 2 in kindergarten, but exhibit much difficulty acquiring the alphabetic principle in grade 1. Other students may move into your school from a school that did not stress phonemic awareness and letter–sound skills in kindergarten.

The recommended decision rules for placement into Tier 3 in grade 1 as identified by Good and colleagues (2002) are as follows:

- In September of grade 1, student scores below 13 letter sounds per minute on DIBELS NWF, or less than 25 letters correct per minute on the DIBELS Letter Naming
Chapter 3

Fluency, or less than 10 segments correct per minute in DIBELS Phonemic Segmentation Fluency.

- In January of grade 1, student scores below 30 letter sounds correct per minute on the DIBELS NWF, or less than 20 words correct per minute on DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (ORF is discussed in Chapter 5).
- In May of grade 1, student scores less than 30 letter sounds correct per minute on the DIBELS NWF, or less than 20 words correct per minute on DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency. The DIBELS recommendation at less than 20 is based on an end-of-first-grade benchmark of 40. Chapter 5 provides discussion about why a year-end benchmark of 60 may be more desirable.

While the decision rules described are research-based and generally accurate, experience dictates that teacher judgment be part of the decision-making equation as well. For example, in some cases teachers have requested that the assessments be given again because the scores did not reflect students’ performance in class. In other cases, students who have borderline scores and who also present behavior problems in class were placed into Tier 3 because their behavior and attention were improved in a small-group setting. Table 3.11 describes how alphabetic principle is taught in each of the five alternative programs described in Chapter 2.

How Can I Teach Alphabetic Principle to English Language Learners?

Systematic and explicit phonics benefits English language learners whether they are first taught to read in English or in their native language. Numerous research studies in the United States and England demonstrate that when young English language learners receive explicit teaching of the alphabetic principle, they outperform their peers in word recognition and comprehension (Stuart, 1999; Gunn et al., 2000; Foorman, 1998). Even when students are not yet fluent in English, explicit practice in sounding out words develops both English reading skills and English speaking skills, if explicit vocabulary instruction accompanies the phonics. Teachers who show pictures or use gestures to depict the meaning of unfamiliar words after students decode those words are teaching both alphabetic principle and comprehension. English language learners also require extra practice learning to articulate letter sounds that have no equivalent in their native language. The length of time learning explicit phonics may be crucial for grade-level reading, with many English language learners requiring two years to catch up to their English-speaking peers.

Fortunately, “cracking the code” in one language often expedites learning to read in a second language. If students first acquire alphabetic principle in their native language, their ability to decode can transfer to later English reading (Durgunoglu, 2002). This transfer will be more difficult for students who had trouble learning to read in their native language, and these same students will be at high risk for reading failure in English unless they get intensive support (Gersten, 1996).

When you listen to an English language learner read, you may have difficulty determining whether a misread word is an actual error or just an articulation difference. Becoming aware of articulation patterns in students’ native languages will help your analysis in these situations. Table 3.12 (p. 119) details pronunciation difficulties that native Spanish speakers may have when reading English text.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do lessons introduce a predesigned sequence of letter sounds?</th>
<th>Direct Instruction: Reading Mastery</th>
<th>Lindamood® LiPS Program</th>
<th>Reading Recovery</th>
<th>Wilson Reading System</th>
<th>Language!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes. However, several sounds are introduced within one sub-step.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does curriculum specifically coordinate letter sounds taught in isolation with first words read in isolation and later in passages?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do students practice letter sounds and word reading, only moving to the next lesson after they are successful?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are phonics cues encouraged as the primary method for reading unfamiliar words?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do lessons introduce a sequence of regular words that are increasingly difficult to decode? (Example: VC or CVC followed by CVC variants)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are students discouraged to guess at words as one strategy for word reading?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is decodable reading used to help students apply the letter–sound knowledge they have learned?</td>
<td>Yes. Program includes decodable reading books that are coordinated with letter sounds and words taught to students.</td>
<td>Yes. Teachers select decodable reading that is coordinated with letter sounds and words taught to students.</td>
<td>No. Program discourages decodable reading.</td>
<td>Yes. Decodable reading in sentences and passages is coordinated with letter sounds and words taught to students.</td>
<td>Yes. Program includes decodable reading books that are coordinated with letter sounds and words taught to students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
| What is the amount of time spent on development of learning letter sounds, sounding out words, writing them, and sounding out words in passages? | After first 30 lessons, almost the entire daily lesson is spent on learning these skills. Comprehension development is also included in lessons. | The use of magnetic letters and word boxes to analyze words comprises a small proportion of the 30-minute lessons, which cover seven activities each day. | Between 66% to 90% of lesson is devoted to learning these skills. Some lessons also include listening comprehension development. | Each literacy lesson is divided into 10 sections and is designed to take 90 minutes. Of those 10 sections, 4 are devoted to these skills. |
| Are sight words pretaught before they appear in reading passages? | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Are the first sight words taught limited to high-frequency words necessary for story reading? | Yes | Yes | No | No. Both real and nonsense words are taught. |
| Is left-to-right blending stressed throughout all word- and passage-reading activities? | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Do students write words that they are learning to read? | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| How are students assessed? | Short mastery tests of word or passage reading given to students approximately every five lessons determine whether students are ready to move to the next lesson or move to a faster- or slower-paced group. | Ongoing observation of the students’ daily performance on reading tasks during lessons provides the foundation for decision-making about how quickly to move through the program. | Teachers keep daily running records, noting errors that students read in predictable books. | Specific criteria are set for reading and spelling per lesson/per substep. Students are post-tested at the end of every step. Assessment determines how quickly student moves through curriculum. | Each unit of 10 lessons contains mastery tasks for the skills presented in that unit. Students are expected to achieve 80% on all tasks to proceed to the next unit. |
How Important Is Alphabetic Principle for Older Learners?

While systematic phonics instruction produces the biggest impact on growth in reading when it begins in kindergarten or grade 1 (National Reading Panel, 2001), teachers are responsible for bringing significant numbers of struggling older readers to proficient levels of reading. The National Assessment of Educational Progress 2003 Report indicated that 50% or more of the fourth- and eighth-graders in the nation’s largest urban areas were below the basic level in reading, unable to demonstrate even partial mastery of the fundamental knowledge and skills. Nationally, about 24% of fourth-graders and 33% of eighth-graders fell below the basic level (Kennedy-Manzo, 2003).

Studies investigating older students and adults who have reading problems reveal that most have basic deficits in decoding skills. Of those older students with decoding deficits, there appear to be two groups (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2003). Older students in one group, the smaller of the two groups, read at the first- and second-grade level. These students have yet to attain the alphabetic principle. The second group are those reading between the second- and fifth-grade levels. While these students can decode single-syllable words and read some high-frequency sight words, they struggle to decode multisyllable words and have considerable difficulty reading connected text fluently. The needs of the smaller group of students who have yet to attain the alphabetic principle are addressed in this chapter. The needs of the larger group of older students with decoding problems are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonants</th>
<th>Vowels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/v/ is often pronounced as /b/ or a sound close to /w/; vase becomes base.</td>
<td>/ɔː/ is often confused with /ɒ/; mat becomes met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the beginning of a word, /v/ is often pronounced as /b/; pet becomes bet.</td>
<td>/æ/ is often pronounced as /ɛt/; meet becomes mit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the beginning of a word, /t/ is often pronounced as /d/; tap becomes dap.</td>
<td>/ɒ/ is often pronounced as /ɛt/; make becomes mek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the beginning of a word, /k/ is often pronounced as /g/; kit becomes git.</td>
<td>/uː/ is often pronounced as /ʊt/; book becomes buk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ʃv/ is usually pronounced as /ʃt/; ship becomes chip.</td>
<td>/ʃɪ/ is often pronounced as /ʃʃt/; ship becomes chip.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/yl/ is often pronounced as /iːl/; yell becomes gell.</td>
<td>/ɑː/ is often pronounced as /iːl/; meet becomes mek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/zl/ is often pronounced as /zʃ/; zig becomes sig.</td>
<td>/æ/ is often pronounced as /ɛt/; met becomes met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ml/, /vl/, and /mg/ may be substituted for each other; ping becomes pin.</td>
<td>At the beginning of a word, /k/ is often pronounced as /g/; kit becomes git.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When words begin with consonant clusters (pr, cl, pl, sl), an extra vowel is often inserted at the beginning of the word; speak becomes espeak.</td>
<td>/oo/; is often pronounced as /ʊʊ/; book becomes buk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When words end with consonant clusters, the final consonant sound is often omitted; fast becomes fas.</td>
<td>/ʃ/ is usually pronounced as /ʃt/; ship becomes chip.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When a voiced /θ/ occurs in the middle or the end of a word, /θ/ is often substituted; mother becomes moder.</td>
<td>/ʃ/ is usually pronounced as /ʃt/; ship becomes chip.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Share has aptly pointed out, it is tempting to focus reading instruction for older students on whole-word recognition because the phonics strategies needed to attain the alphabetic principle appear to be babyish (Share, 1995). In addition, progress in developing systematic word attack skills can be slow at first, as guessing habits acquired during many years of previous instruction are difficult to unlearn. Slow progress combined with student reluctance can act to weaken teachers’ resolve to stay the alphabetic principle course. Nonetheless, teachers are urged to use curricula with these older readers that is aimed at systematically and explicitly developing an awareness of the alphabetic principle (Lerner, 1989). Otherwise these students will remain stuck in the word guessing mode for the rest of their lives.

The teacher’s only productive option when teaching alphabetic principle to older learners is to step back and teach the phonemic awareness, letter–sound skills, regular word reading skills, and coordinated passage reading skills previously described in Chapters 2 and 3. However, doing so presents two challenges. The first is to find a text that is not only explicit and systematic but also has age-appropriate stories and doesn’t look “babyish.” Three evidence-based programs that have these features are Corrective Reading (Engelmann, Carnine, Johnson, Meyer, Becker, & Eisele, 1999), Language! (Greene, 2000), and Wilson Reading System (Wilson, 1996). The second challenge is to find enough instructional time during the school day. Programs such as the three identified here are designed for a minimum of an hour-and-a-half to two hours of intensive teaching each day.

How Can I Use Games to Reinforce Students’ Decoding Skills?

Once your students are decoding CVC and CVC-variant words, use every opportunity to take advantage of the school environment for more practice. Using the words your students can decode, make posters with short poems or captions describing a funny picture and display these posters in areas where your students routinely wait—outside of the bathroom, by the lunchroom waiting line, near the library. Draw your students’ attention to the posters, asking them questions about content. You will help your students feel like readers, actively applying their reading to the outside world.

After students have successfully read a decodable book, play “Landing on Mars” with them. Ask your students to turn to a page in their book and hold up their index finger as the rocket. When you call out a word that is on the page, they are to launch their rocket into the air and land it on the word you named. Say, for example, “Find shut.” (pause) “Find pigpen.” (pause) “Find rack.” (pause) “Yes! This class landed on Mars all three times!” Students will work their hardest to find the words quickly, speeding up the rate at which they are decoding.

The Word Box Game

Put several clear word-building boxes on an accessible shelf so that students can play Word Box when they have completed other work.

Prepare the Game  
Inside each box put:

- lower-case letters of only the letter sounds you have taught your students. All of the vowels should be a distinctive color or marked with a distinctive tape.

This article by Louisa C. Moats, “When Older Students Can’t Read,” explains some of the benefits that result from teaching phonics to older struggling readers: www.cdl.org/resource-library/articles/older_read.html
## Technology

### Alphabetic Principle

Because there is so little published research investigating the effectiveness of computer-assisted phonics instruction, the National Reading Panel could only conclude that computer technology “appears to hold promise” for reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000, 6–2). To date, computer software designed to improve reading instruction is still in its infancy and most appropriately used in classrooms to supplement or reinforce a systematic, explicit phonics program.

Teaching students who are at risk to move from letter sounds to alphabetic principle requires extremely careful, coordinated instruction. More instruction is not always better instruction, especially when poorly designed activities contribute to mistakes that the student will later have to unlearn. Teachers who are evaluating software to supplement their instruction in letter sounds, word-reading, or passage-reading should consider the following factors:

- How closely coordinated is the teaching of letter sounds with the students’ daily reading curriculum? Check the order in which the letter sounds are introduced. If the order is different, reorder the sequence presented in the computer program. If the computer software program includes digitized speech, the letter sounds should match your articulation. For example, letter sounds should be articulated without schwas. Finally, check the intelligibility of the synthesized speech. Although the quality of synthesized speech continues to improve, the longer sentences are sometimes unintelligible.

- How well do the games and activities involving regular word reading reflect skills that students have learned? For example, if students have not yet learned to decode consonant blends, they should not be expected to read consonant blend words while playing a computer game. If the skills stressed in the games and activities do not match your reading curriculum, find out whether the design allows you to modify types of words and text that are read.

- Does the program introduce regular words comprised of letter sounds that the students can identify? Are those same words later in closed sentences, paragraphs, or stories? If not, the activities are likely to be of little benefit in strengthening skills covered in the daily reading curriculum.

- Is the phonics program systematic and explicit? Computer assisted instructional phonics programs may include nonsystematic phonics activities reminiscent of those in the most tedious workbooks of years past. Computer phonics programs may also undermine your systematic phonics program by encouraging students to guess at words and memorize too many whole words. Finally, since the student isn’t using her finger while reading, monitoring left-to-right reading is difficult, if not impossible.

- Does the software program include performance checks to assure that students reach mastery before moving on to a more difficult skill?

- Does the program have a built-in monitoring system that allows you to evaluate how the student is progressing?

### Prepare the Students

1. Tell students to bring a pencil and piece of paper when they play Word Boxes.

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- a laminated grid that students use to make words, placing a letter on each square (Figure 3.16).
- a pencil
- a “rocket” sheet that students can use for writing their words (Figure 3.17).

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**FIGURE 3.16 Grid**
2. Teach the game to students, showing them how to put a letter in each box. Tell students to always put a marked vowel in the middle box.
3. After students put a letter into each box, ask them to say the letter sounds quietly before blending them into a word.
4. Tell students to write the word they read on their paper, reading it out loud one more time after they write it.
5. Show students how to write their grand total on the page. Enthusiastically describe how, as they learn more and more words, their total numbers will get bigger and bigger.
6. Monitor students carefully as they play the game during this teaching phase to assure that they will follow all of the steps when they independently take out the word boxes.

What Activities Help Students Apply Their Newly Acquired Alphabetic Principle?

By midyear of first grade, students on track to read at grade level should have developed alphabetic principle and be ready to read more difficult words containing long vowels, more advanced sound clusters such as *tch*, and multisyllable words. Students will advance more quickly if they have the opportunity to receive feedback and help when needed by reading aloud to the teacher, tutors, parents, or older siblings. Some classrooms have successfully used First-Grade Peer-Assisted Literacy Strategies (PALS) (grade 1–grade 2) to provide more oral reading practice of connected text. In these classrooms, a stronger reader is
paired with a weaker reader to coach him or her. Students are taught to cooperate with their partners, praise their partners, and work steadily at reading. Student coaches learn to teach and practice letter–sound identification, word-reading, and connected text reading. By the time they begin working independently with their partners, these students have even learned to give a My Turn–Your Turn response any time the weaker student makes an error. The positive feedback and effective error correction are critical elements in this process (Mathes & Babyak, 2001). A similar PALS strategy has also been effective with weaker high school readers (Fuchs et al., 1999).

Connecting reading to spelling further develops reading skills. Not only should students be able to read CVC and CVC variants by December, but they should also accurately spell those words that are regular, where the letters match the sounds exactly. Once students can read words that contain sh, they should also write words that contain that pattern. Rather than having to memorize words such as shut, shed, sharp, and ship, students are able to automatically spell them once they have learned to read the sh pattern. The teacher who then tells her students to write a story about a big red bug who lives in a shag rug is extending her students’ new learning even further. Shortly after the beginning of first grade is also the time to begin teaching the spelling of a few of the most common sight words that

Research to Practice

**Attitudes of Students Who Are at Risk**

Effective teaching for children who are at risk involves providing them with frequent opportunities to practice the skills they are learning. Practice activities are most successful when a teacher is animated, teaches at a perky pace, and challenges her students without frustrating them. Still, much controversy surrounds the issue of student practice, with repeated practice activities often being referred to as “drill and kill.”

Prior to acquiring the alphabetic principle, Project PRIDE students spent many hours with teachers and staff identifying letter sounds, reading new words, and reading decodable passages. Particularly challenging for teachers and students alike was having to sound out words in both lists and passages before reading them the fast way. While our students seemed to enjoy the lively pace and the reading success brought by the practice, given the controversy in the field over the use of practice, we wanted to be certain that the daily drill and decodable reading was not dampening student interest in reading.

In order to investigate exactly how our students felt about reading, we assessed our first cohort of students at the end of grades 1 and 2 using the “Elementary Reading Attitude Survey” (McKenna & Kear, 1990). In this survey, student attitudes towards both academic and recreational reading are assessed. Students are asked to circle a picture of Garfield the cat that best depicts how they feel in response to items that are read aloud by the teacher. Ten of the items assess academic reading, while another ten assess recreational reading or reading for fun. To answer each question, students select either the “very happy” Garfield standing with a big smile, the “little bit happy” Garfield, the “little bit upset” Garfield, or the “very upset” Garfield, who had a distinctive scowl. Questions such as, “How do you feel about reading instead of playing?” assess students’ attitudes towards recreational reading. Questions such as, “How do you feel about the stories you read in reading class?” assess academic reading.

Scores for all of the instructional tiers for both grades 1 and 2 were uniformly high; students enjoyed both academic and recreational reading, scoring an average of 3 out of 4 on both types of items. Despite the frequent presence of drill in the reading instruction, students in all of the tiers liked to read, confirming our strong belief that when practice is lively and geared to student needs on skills leading to important outcomes, practice will thrill, not kill.
Motivating Your Students to Do Their Best

Strategies to Encourage Positive Behavior

- Ms. Larson used the Teacher's Rocking Chair game to teach self-control to her kindergarteners and help them learn to sit quietly for short amounts of time. Before she started playing the game with her students, when a parent, the principal, or a special education teacher would walk into the kindergarten and need a minute to talk to Ms. Larson, a few students, noticing that the teacher was occupied, would become loud or misbehave to get her attention. Ms. Larson wanted to teach everyone to sit for a few quiet moments without interrupting. During the rocking chair game, all of the children sat in rows on the carpet. One student was selected to sit in the teacher's large rocking chair in front of the room. The selected student sat in the rocking chair surveying everyone else to determine the "quietest" student who would get the next turn to sit in the chair. When Ms. Larson said, "Your turn is up," the student in the chair picked another quiet student. Everyone wanted to be selected for the rocking chair. Students knew that if they talked during the transition when the next student was walking to the chair that they lost their chance to sit in the chair. After starting to use the game, Ms. Larson established the rule that "girls pick boys and boys pick girls," so that everyone would have a chance. Often Ms. Larson instructed students to "pick someone who hasn't had a turn," or "pick someone by the time you've counted to 20." Even after students had learned to quietly wait for short time periods, Ms. Larson continued to use the game because students asked for the opportunity to play it. Students learned self-control playing the game and applied these skills to other situations during the day such as waiting for their turn when answering questions about a story the teacher was reading.

- Ms. Buddin brought several large bowling trophies to her class to encourage students to follow the classroom rules when working at their tables. Quiet talking was allowed, but students were expected to finish their work or project and to ask permission if they needed to leave the table. When Ms. Buddin noticed everyone at a table following the rules, she put a bowling trophy on the surface. When someone didn’t follow a rule, the trophy was removed. Gradually, working quietly became routine and the trophies were no longer needed.

- Ms. Gibbs wanted her students to become more aware of the impact their behavior had on other individuals in their community. She knew that some of her students had little experience receiving positive feedback from adults and needed to learn the feeling of pride for doing a good job which others appreciated. Thus Ms. Gibbs hung a "Compliments Chart" in the front of her classroom. Anytime the students, collectively or individually, received a compliment from anyone in the building—the principal, the custodian, another teacher, a parent—a tally mark was put on the compliment chart. When the hundredth tally mark was put on the chart, the class earned a special surprise, which might be a pizza party or the opportunity to have a picnic lunch outside. Students who left the classroom for reading group looked forward to earning points for the class on days when their reading teacher complimented them during the lesson.

- Ms. Foley set up an "office" space where Terrance, a distractible student, could go to do his best work. By having a student desk and chair surrounded on two sides by dividers in the quietest part of the room, she could redirect him to work in the office when he could not complete independent work in a larger group. She would redirect him, by saying, "Terry, take your journal to the office where you can do your best work." Rather than a punishment area, the "office" provided a quieter, less distracting work place to complete work. Ms. Foley’s goal was to get Terrance to independently go to the office when he realized that he wasn’t focused on a paper or project.

- Every teacher periodically used group clapping, pats on the back, and thumbs up to acknowledge effort, hard work, and rule-following during reading class.
  "Sharnicca, give yourself a thumbs up. You wrote so much in your journal today."
  "Everybody, pat yourself on the back, because you just read every word without even one mistake."
students are now reading in their stories. The more students read, formally spell, and use these words in their writing, the faster they will recognize them in text.

Fact or Fiction

A list of common questions about beginning instruction in word reading for students who are at risk is incorporated into the Fact or Fiction questions below. Determine how many reading myths you could identify as you read through the questions. Were you surprised at some of the answers? Compare your answers with those of a partner and discuss the questions that fooled you. Do effective teaching practices for students who are at risk mirror or differ from your philosophy about teaching reading? Select a question that involves a topic that you would like to research further.

1. **Beginning reading programs should stress using the context to figure out words because that is what skilled readers do.**

   **Fact**

   **Fiction.** Research by Stanovich and Stanovich (1995) shows that the “skills of the good reader are so rapid, automatic, and efficient that the skilled reader need not rely on contextual information. In fact, it is the poor readers who guess from context out of necessity because their decoding skills are so weak” (p. 92). In addition, while context cues can be helpful in figuring out the meaning of words, they are less reliable as aids in word identification. For example, Gough and colleagues (1981) found that words can be predicted from surrounding text only 10 to 20% of the time. In our experience, reading approaches that stress the use of context too soon lead to students guessing at words, rather than strategically trying to figure them out. The approach taken in the text emphasizes sounding-out early in reading instruction. Sounding-out is helpful even when reading words that are not completely regular. Only later, when students have mastered the alphabetic principle and are encountering multisyllable words with irregular parts, is using the context suggested as a strategy—and then, only after known parts of words have been decoded first.

2. **An effective reading program for students who are at risk should include a high proportion of high-frequency sight words, since these are the kinds of words they are most likely to find in print.**

   **Fact**

   **Fiction.**
Fiction. The problem with high-frequency sight words is that they have to be memorized to be learned. The presence of too many of these words before students attain the alphabetic principle can undermine the sounding-out strategy that you are trying to build, and encourage guessing. Reducing the number of words learned by sight makes initial reading easier for students by simply letting them concentrate on the mechanics of sounding out regular words (Camnine, Silbert, & Kame’enui, 1997). The approach taken in this text is that teaching some high-frequency sight words is unavoidable if students are to be able to read passages. It is recommended, however, to keep the proportion of sight words in beginning readers to less than 20% (Beck, 1981).

3. Drill on word reading skills does not reduce student motivation to read.

Fact
Fact. When phonics instruction is systematic and explicit, students are made to apply their knowledge of phonics as they read words, sentences, and text (Armbruster et al., 2001). This means that students are provided with repeated practice of what they are learning. Repeated practice, or drill, is an indispensable part of teaching students who are at risk to read, particularly when learning material for the first time (Engelmann, 1995). Why, then, is such an important part of teaching often criticized and referred to as “drill and kill?” Although part of the answer to this question may be due to differences in philosophy, it is also true that drill can be abused as a teaching technique and that it needs to be conducted appropriately to be effective. Otherwise, drill and practice can cause students to become bored or frustrated. In our experience, drill can “kill” when students practice a skill that is too difficult for them, practice a skill in which they are already fluent, practice a meaningless skill, or when single drill sessions are carried out for long periods of time. On the other hand, drill can “thrill” when students have acquired a skill and need repeated practice to become more fluent, it is conducted for brief periods of time, it is used to strengthen an important skill, and the resulting fluency contributes to successful performance of higher-level skills. Despite the presence of much drill in our project, students exhibited an overwhelmingly positive attitude toward reading, largely because they were experiencing success (see the Preface and Chapter 3 for specific project PRIDE results related to student attitudes).

Fiction.

4. Decodable books are boring for children and reduce their motivation to read.

Fact
Fiction. The purpose of decodable books is to give students an opportunity to apply the phonics skills they have learned to connected text. Because the words in decodable books are selected according to the sounds they contain, their prose can seem stilted and unnatural. For example, a book about “Nat the fat cat who sat on a rat” is definitely not award-winning literature. Nonetheless, for what they do, which is strengthening students’ skill at sounding out words as they attain the alphabetic principle, decodable texts are an important part of an explicit, systematic reading program. When used appropriately, decodable books lead to high levels of student success and motivation to read, not boredom. Project PRIDE students were exposed to decodable books in all three instructional tiers, the books did not have a negative impact on their desire to read.

Fiction.

5. Since Letter Naming Fluency is such a good predictor of reading difficulties, we should spend a part of each day teaching students to identify letter names as quickly as possible.

Fact
Fiction.
Fiction: DIBELS Letter Naming is a good indicator of how efficiently students can process written information. Knowing that a student is a slow processor is important, because it informs the teacher that the student requires more practice to become fluent in reading skills. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the act of identifying letters quickly itself is directly related to reading words. As Carnine, Silbert, & Kame'enui (1990) point out, knowledge of letter sounds is much more useful in pre-alphabetic reading. For example, letter names differ from the sounds said when beginning words are pronounced. Therefore, knowing the letters m, a, and n will not enable a beginning reader to read the word man. On the other hand, knowing the sounds for /m/, /a/, and /n/ will be of help to a reader attempting to decode the word man.

**Applied Activities**

1. A sample sequence of letter–sound introduction for a beginning reading program is shown below. Critique the sequence using guidelines proposed by Carnine and colleagues (2004) described in Table 3.4. Is the change systematic? Describe any changes you would make.

2. In the list of words below, circle the digraphs, underline the diphthongs, and cross out the consonant blends.

3. Following is a list of CVC variants. Label each as to the type of CVC word it exemplifies. For example, sat would be labeled CVC; trip would be labeled CCVC.

4. Say the following consonant blends in unison as a group without adding schwas:

5. Mr. Hayes introduced the letter–sound /h/ yesterday. In the past few weeks he has taught his students to identify /m/, /a/, /s/, /f/, /t/, and /b/. Demonstrate how you would instruct Mr. Hayes’ class today using the format in Table 3.4: Part B to teach the new and review sounds.

6. How would you provide differentiated instruction using the following lesson designed to introduce the /t/ sound?

7. Shown below are the results for three students on the DIBELS NWF measure given in January. Identify the student who is performing at benchmark levels. How would you characterize the particular skill level for the two students not at benchmark levels? In a sentence or two, recommend a future instructional focus for all three students.
8. Shown below are the scores for Mrs. Green’s first-grade class on the DIBELS NWF assessment in January. Identify which students are at benchmark, which students will need Tier 2 booster sessions, and which students, pending further testing, might be eligible for an alternative, intensive program in Tier 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonsense Words:</th>
<th>January Letter-Sounds</th>
<th>Correct per Minute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladariu</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skylar</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tylar</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jatavia</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaylin</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dezazh</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delundre</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanteria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brant</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarnecia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
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<td>Trae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vantrell</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Ms. Munoz wanted her students to practice reading the following words on the chalkboard. Demonstrate how she would teach these words using the format described in Table 3.5.

- hop
- shop
- fish
- dish
- hot
- shot
- quick
- that

10. The reading curriculum informs Ms. Foley that students need to learn the following sight words, which will be in the next story: *bough, buy, and month*. She plans to have students practice the following review words that came from last week’s story: *ghost, steak*. Demonstrate how you would instruct Ms. Foley’s class using Table 3.8 for teaching sight words.

11. Karisha is a pre-alphabetic reader who has learned the following beginning reading skills:

- Letter sounds: a s m t r b l w n f k h g
- Sight words: a is his the

Shown below are representative passages from three decodable books. Select the passage that would be most appropriate for Karisha. Indicate why.

**Passage 1**
Sam hit Kit in the hip. Sam is a big brat and will ram Matt.

**Passage 2**
Ed did run past his Dad. He ran fast and had fun.

**Passage 3**
Tom did help mom. Tom went to get milk and a big box of hot nuts.

12. Passages from two hypothetical reading programs are shown below. By the end of November, Ms. Tonnato’s students, whose DIBELS NWF scores range between 18 and 25, have learned all of the short vowel sounds and the consonant sounds listed on the letter–sound chart at the end of Chapter 1. Ms. Tonnato wants to provide extra decodable reading for her students who do not have alphabetic principle. Which passage would be more likely to lead to student success? Justify your answer.

**Passage #1**
The girl looked out the window. The sun was shining in the sky. “I think I will go outside today,” she said. She left the house. She walked past a food stand. There was a big pile of donuts at the stand. She walked past the apple tree. There was a big cow under the apple tree. So she went home to get some lunch. I will get a sandwich, some juice, and an orange to eat.

**Passage #2**
Fran is fast. She can jump and hop and run fast. She gets to the swing first. I am mad. I can not jump and hop and run fast. But then I stop and think. I can hum and sing and skip. I sing for gramps and hum for mom. I skip up and down the steps. I will be pals with Fran. I can help Fran hum and sing and skip. Fran can help me jump and hop and run fast.
References


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