

Green Lights, Red Flags, Gray Areas: Choices Matter

<i>Green Lights: Teach</i>	<i>Red Flags: Don't Teach</i>	<i>Gray Areas: Choose to Teach?</i>
<i>Letter Knowledge</i>		
Alphabetic Principle: <i>Letters (graphemes) represent sounds (phonemes).</i>	<i>Letters say sounds.</i> (Letters <i>spell</i> sounds so <i>people</i> can <i>say</i> sounds when seeing graphemes.)	Labeling vowels as <i>long</i> or <i>short</i> and pointing out where they occur in <i>open</i> and <i>closed</i> syllables.
A review of all letter sounds of the alphabet daily, preferably using <i>Letter-Embedded Picture Mnemonics</i> ; focus on a few letters each week for activities promoting blending (<i>decoding</i>) and segmenting (<i>encoding</i>); do spiral review of sounds practiced.	Letter of the week; postponement of blending and segmenting until all letter sounds are mastered; independent activities that don't involve matching spellings to sounds by actively voicing letter sounds; insufficient time allocated to both blending and segmenting.	Letter names and letter sounds together. Many struggling readers attempt to blend words using letter names rather than sounds. Simplifying the representations by emphasizing sounds can eliminate this confusion when decoding; including letter names can be delayed.
<i>Phonemic Awareness</i>		
Phonemic Awareness practice initially with tokens, soon followed by letters for both encoding and decoding lessons using dictation of word chains and words in decodable text; use both letter tiles and writing letters on white boards and/or paper.	A progression of phonological awareness skills: syllables, rime units, phonemes; repeated practice to master larger phonological units before teaching phonemic awareness; decoding rime units as a whole rather than separating each phoneme.	Fun, whole body phonemic awareness activities without letters as <i>brain breaks</i> ; follow oral-only phonemic awareness activities with application to independent writing to provide opportunities for segmenting practice, linking sounds with letters.
<i>Encoding (Writing)</i>		
Phonics patterns and sentence structure practiced through dictation and daily independent writing using invented spelling followed by corrections made within reason; expect and provide correctness in some lessons.	An insistence on spelling accuracy beyond phonics patterns and words taught rather than phonetically plausible attempts; exclusive focus on copying instead of allowing individual word production; insufficient time for writing practice.	Alphabet nameplates and Elkonin boxes taped on student desks to facilitate letter formation and sounding out words during independent writing activities; other mnemonic tools for scaffolds; provide a variety of writing activities.
An integration of <i>phonology</i> (pronunciation), <i>orthography</i> (spelling), and <i>semantics</i> (meaning) when teaching new words such as in the <i>Hear-It, Say-It, Write-It, Read-It, Use-It</i> routine.	'Silent' phonics lessons such as independent word sorts, filling in worksheets, cutting and pasting activities, and games where students are not demonstrating an integration of phonology with orthography.	Extended practice with new words learned beyond dictation, word chains, and independent application to writing; students say the phoneme while writing the grapheme regardless of the writing genre or activity.
<i>Decoding (Reading)</i>		
Systematic, synthetic blending of phonics patterns taught (simple to complex) using a scope and sequence for exposure to the most common spellings for sounds; addressing other phonics patterns as time allows for exposure.	Unsystematic (opportunistic) phonics patterns that do not follow a sequence but happen to occur during a read-aloud or guided reading of a leveled text and are therefore less likely to transfer to long-term memory due to insufficient practice.	<i>Teachability Moments</i> whereby incidentally a student's question during a read-aloud or about a phonics pattern discovered in a book receives brief attention to promote exposure to and experience with a variety of phonics patterns.

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Blending as soon as possible once a few consonants and vowels have been taught; encoding and decoding activities using the same phonics patterns to reinforce exposure.	Postponement of blending practice because the sounds of the target letters haven't been 'mastered'; waiting for one phonics pattern to be mastered before introducing another.	Games/activities involving letter/sound connections; differentiate as needed by choosing easier or more difficult words with the same pattern (haul vs. overhaul).
Decodable text using <i>continuous phonation</i> whereby students slowly <i>slide</i> through a word and then repeat the word faster instead of pausing to say each phoneme and then saying the whole word; as needed, use <i>successive blending</i> with the first two sounds and then add the final sound.	Predictable text using the three-cueing system (guessing based on pictures and context); covering a word in text and having students guess based on context; using sounding out strategies as a last resort; emphasizing word <i>meaning</i> before word <i>identification</i> .	At point of difficulty, encourage students to map the sounds in their Elkonin Boxes, on fingertips, or across the body and then attempt continuous blending once the phonemes have been clarified; ask <i>What sound do you say?</i> instead of <i>What sound do you hear?</i>
Phonics patterns practiced with decodable text using <i>flexible pronunciations</i> when graphemes are misread and pointing out <i>tendencies</i> such as when 'ay' appears in a word vs. 'ai'; introduce new vocabulary in text by emphasizing sounds, spellings, and meanings: <i>phonology</i> , <i>orthography</i> , and <i>semantics</i> .	Long list of phonics rules students are expected to memorize; spelling tests unrelated to phonics patterns taught; vocabulary work that doesn't unite <i>phonology</i> (sounds), <i>orthography</i> (spelling), and <i>semantics</i> (meaning) and is not integrated with text reading: decodable, differentiated, natural language, and grade-level.	Introduction of a new phonics pattern by dictating word chains with the target sound to be read in the decodable text to provide an opportunity to do phonemic analysis of the words with the new pattern and to attempt to encode each phoneme with a grapheme; use <i>Hear-It, Say-It, Write-It, Read-It, Use-It routine</i> .
Decodable text that contains high frequency words and repeated phonics patterns as well as other types of text: controlled text with repeated vocabulary, multi-criteria text for exposure to and fluency practice with a range of words, not just those with phonics patterns taught.	Predictable text whereby students guess words based on the picture and context; decodable text that relies extensively on phonics patterns taught, especially once the basic code (CVC words) has been covered; exclusive use of differentiated or leveled text.	Use blackline copies of decodable text or other consumables to label pictures and highlight phonics patterns taught prior to reading the text; when reading as a whole class, the teacher stops reading so students can highlight the target words as they say them; reread with partners.
Analysis of high frequency words to point out all sound/spelling correspondences and to acquaint students with any irregularities in pronunciation; review often.	Memorization of high frequency words without doing phonemic analysis and reinforcing which parts are decodable; lack of emphasis on both regular and irregular graphemes.	Use mnemonic techniques to color or outline the irregular parts of high frequency words to emphasize the need to alter a pronunciation; guide students through making flashcards.
Syllabication		
Prefixes and suffixes once students can decode CVC words— <i>s, ed, er, ly, ing, re, un</i> .	Morphemes before students can read CVC words; morphemes decontextualized from words.	'Grab' two-syllable words by chunking sounds, one in each fist, and joining fists together.
Syllabication through the grouping of sounds within chunks with at least one vowel (or vowel team), using generalizations, identification of phonics patterns, and flexible pronunciations (<i>set for variability</i>) to decode each syllable.	Syllabication only through analysis of syllable types or phonics rules; activities that don't practice different pronunciations for the same spelling ('ed' pronounced /t/, /d/, or /ed/); memorization of decodable morphemes.	Syllable types that show tendencies within syllabication; alert students to word endings that are not completely decodable (ture, tion, tient); use morphology chains and a morphology matrix to help students use affixes: <i>helpful, unhelpful</i> .