

Word Reading and Decoding

Highlights

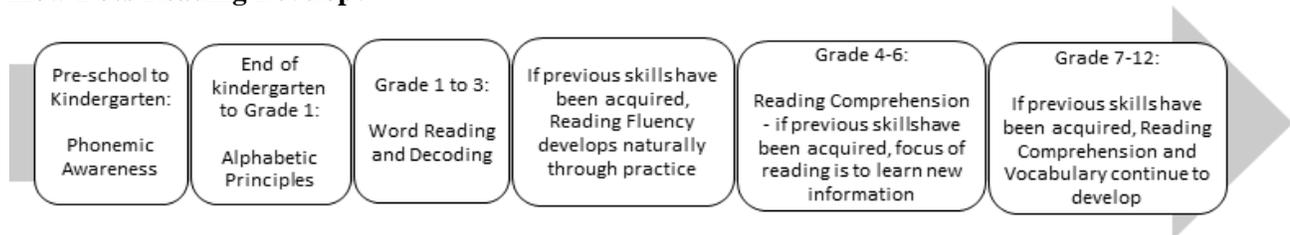
What is this reading skill? Word Reading is the ability to read familiar words. Decoding is the ability to sound out unfamiliar words.

When should this skill be developed? Grade 1 to 3

Why is this skill important for reading? These skills are supported by the pre-reading skills of Phonemic Awareness and Alphabetic Principles. They are essential for reading fluency and reading comprehension.

How can you practice this skill with your child? Using flash cards for common/high-frequency and/or irregular words, breaking down words that they struggle with, and practicing the decoding of sight words through repeated reading.

How Does Reading Develop?



Reading develops in a step-by-step fashion. It begins with Phonemic Awareness, which is the understanding and manipulation of the sounds of the English language (for example, knowing that “dog” has three sounds: ‘d’, ‘o’, ‘g’). The next stage of reading development is Alphabetic Principles (knowing what sound(s) each letter makes). Once a child has a good understanding of sounds and letters, they start to decode unfamiliar words (Decoding refers to the ability to sound out words or non-words) and then recognize familiar words (Word Reading). Reading Fluency is the ability to read passages quickly and accurately, and Reading Comprehension is the ability to understand and remember what has been read. Vocabulary develops naturally as children are exposed to language and reading but can also be explicitly taught if students are falling behind. With the exception of Vocabulary, development of each skill is dependent on the child’s prior skills; for example, a child who does not have a strong understanding of Alphabetic Principles will struggle to decode until earlier skills have fully developed.

Word Reading and Decoding Overview

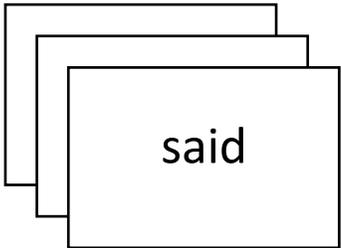
Word Reading and Decoding are among the key skills that children need to develop before they can read fluently and comprehend what they are reading. By the end of Grade 3, children should be able to read familiar words and sound out unfamiliar words. This includes, for example, reading sight words, reading common words, and understanding the meaning of the words they are reading. Can your child:

- Read **sight** words? (e.g., non-decodable words like “the”, “was”, “of”)
- Read **common** words? (e.g., decodable words like “in”, “we”, “no”)
- Sound out **unfamiliar** words?
- Understand the meaning of the word they are reading?

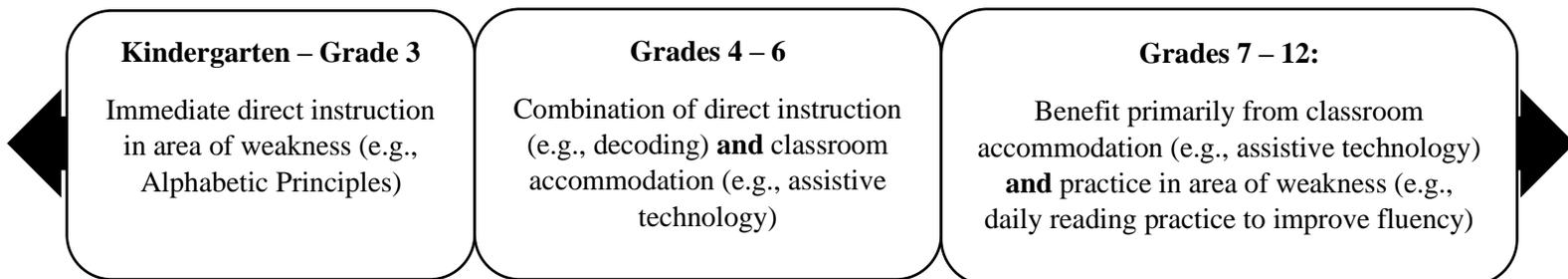
Weaknesses in Word Reading and Decoding may lead to difficulties in developing more advanced reading skills such as reading fluency and reading comprehension. Without a solid foundation of Word Reading and Decoding skills children may encounter frustrating challenges when they try to read familiar words, decode unfamiliar words, and understand what each word means.

Core Instructional Principles:

Children with weaknesses in Word Reading and Decoding often struggle to read words accurately and read text fluently. Consistent practice in phonetic decoding and repeated reading of sight words are essential in their reading development. These skills can develop through reading (i.e., books or poems), or through auditory means (i.e., songs or music). The following activities will help your child develop word reading and decoding skills:

1. **Flash Cards for ‘Irregular Words’:** Irregular words are words that do not follow usual letter-sound rules (e.g., *said, are, was*). It is important for your child to recognize these words ‘at sight’ so they do not get stuck trying to decode them while they read. To help with this, you can:
 - a. Talk to your child about the irregular words that they will often see in the texts that they are reading
 - b. Write common irregular words on flash cards (one word per card)
 - c. Practice testing your child with the flash cards (e.g., present a card with an irregular word to your child and have them tell you what it says)
 - d. Test your child with these flash cards once a day until they can accurately recognize the irregular words for more than 3 days in a row
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2. **Breaking it Down:** When a child who struggles with decoding reads a passage, they will frequently find unfamiliar words that they must decode. This activity allows them to work through the word sound-by-sound to practice decoding and learn new words.
 - a. Ask your child to point to the first letter in the word and to say the name of each letter in the word (*s t r a p*)
 - b. Ask your child to point again to the first letter, and tell them to sound out all of the letter-sounds, starting from the first one (“s”, “t”, “r”, “a”, “p”)
 - c. Model as needed, slowly reading each letter-sound out loud.
 - d. Put it all together and read the word smoothly (e.g., *strap*). Repeat as needed.
 3. **Repeated Reading:** Practice can help common sight words stick in your child’s brain so that they can easily recognize and read the word in sentences and books. Repeated reading can help your child with this by having them read a short passage out loud many times (at least four times) until they can accurately and fluently read 95% of the words in the text.

Intervention Timeline: Younger students (K-3) are often able to make significant gains in areas of weakness if direct instruction is provided. As students get older, it becomes more difficult to learn key skills, so a combination of instruction and classroom accommodations is important. As students transition to middle and high school, accommodations become essential. However, accommodations are a **supplement** to remediation, not a replacement. Accommodations are used to bypass word-level reading issues; they will not “fix” the problem or make students better at reading, but additional supports will allow them to be more **independent** in reading activities.



Classroom Accommodations:

- Assistive Technology: text-to-speech software
- Instruction: Peer or adult can read text out loud as a model; materials presented electronically

External Resources for Parents, Teachers, and Schools

- “Word Decoding and Phonics” at www.readingrockets.org
- “Word Wall” at www.readingrockets.org
- “Dolch Sight Words List” at www.sightwords.com