

Literacy Glossary for Parents and Caregivers

At our school, we are deeply committed to supporting every child in learning to read. We are on a collaborative journey to provide the best possible instruction for all students, and we value our partnership with you. Please see below for some literacy terms you may hear or see us use.

Phoneme

A phoneme is a **sound** in a language. In English, there are around 44 sounds or phonemes that make up our spoken language. We use these sounds when we speak.

Phonemic Awareness

Research on how children learn to read shows that phonemic awareness is incredibly important in predicting which students will learn to read easily, and which will have difficulty. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and work with the phonemes, or sounds, of language.

We teach students to:

- identify the sounds they hear in words
 - “What is the first sound you hear in *sun*?”
- blend individual sounds together to make a word
 - “My sounds are /l/ /i/ /p/ - push them together, and what is the word?”
- split a word into its individual sounds
 - “What are the sounds you hear in the word *truck*?”

Grapheme

A grapheme is the **letter** or **combination of letters** that represent phonemes, or sounds.

Some graphemes are single letters, like <t> or <p>, but some are combinations of more than one letter, like <ch> or <igh>.

Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondence (Phonics)

Reading and writing is like cracking a code. When students read, they are translating symbols on a page to oral language. When they write, they are translating oral language to print.

To do this, students need to know the relationships between letters and sounds. We teach these relationships clearly and directly, and give students lots of practice with them, so they develop strong reading and spelling skills.

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Consonant Blend

A consonant blend is a group of consonants where each consonant keeps its sound. For example, the word *slip* has the blend made of /s/ /l/.

Blends can have more than 2 sounds (**s***pr***ing**), and can be found at the beginning and end of words (**cl***ap*, **we***st)*

Consonant Digraph

A consonant digraph is a group of 2 consonants that combine to represent one sound. For example, the word *cash* has the digraph <sh>. The letters <s> and <h> are combined to represent one sound.

Orthographic Knowledge

Orthography is a language's writing system. In English, the way sounds are spelled depends on their position in words, which means there are patterns in how we might spell a word.

For example, there are many different ways of spelling the /k/ sound - <c>, <k>, or <ck>. We usually use <ck> at the end of a word right after a short vowel, like in *brick* or *truck*. We wouldn't use <ck> at the beginning of a word.

We clearly and directly teach students these spelling patterns.

Morphological Knowledge

Words in English are spelled based on their sounds as well as their meaning - sometimes we can't just sound out a word to spell it. We need to also know the meaningful parts of words

Morphology is the study of parts of words that carry meaning - prefixes, suffixes, and bases:

un + help + ful

prefix *base* *suffix*
"not" "full of"

Students need to know the meanings and spellings of prefixes, suffixes, and bases to help them read accurately, understand what they read, and spell words correctly in writing.

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Sight Word

Sight words are sometimes described as high-frequency words that need to be memorized – this is not the case. A sight word is a word that a student can recognize effortlessly without having to sound out.

Skilled readers can recognize tens of thousands of words by sight, allowing them to read quickly and effortlessly. Building up a large sight word vocabulary is an important part of learning to read.

The most efficient way to learn a word “by sight” is by repeatedly sounding it out, not by memorizing. When a word contains an unusual spelling we draw students’ attention to the parts of a word that aren’t regular, but we still encourage students to sound out the parts that are regular.

Decodable Text

When learning phonics, students need plenty of practice using this new knowledge when reading.

We use decodable text to give students this practice – these are sentences, passages or books that are controlled to include words only made up of phonics patterns that have been taught.

When reading decodable text with a child, focus on prompting them to sound out words. Encourage students to say the sounds for the letters they see, then blend the sounds together into a word. Try not to prompt them to use the picture to figure out a word, or to think about what would make sense.

Fluency

Fluency in reading is the ability to read accurately, automatically, with expression. When students read fluently, they are able to think about and remember what the text means.

While fluency does include reading rate, we don’t encourage students to read faster. We focus on building students’ word reading to make sure they can read accurately, and give them lots of practice reading text out loud, which will build their reading fluency.

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Consonant and Vowel Notation

As students are learning to read, we carefully sequence the types of words students practice reading. Sometimes you will see educators use C and V to describe word patterns. This notation is used to show how many sounds are in a word, and what types of sounds are in a word:

CV: consonant-vowel, like *me*

VC: vowel-consonant, like *at*

CVC: consonant-vowel-consonant, like *sit*

CCVC: consonant-consonant-vowel-consonant, like *slip*

CVCC: consonant-vowel-consonant-consonant, like *west*

Accuracy and Automaticity

Reading comprehension is an incredibly complex set of skills! To understand what they read, students must be proficient with lots of other smaller subskills.

When thinking of these skills (knowing letter-sounds, blending, segmenting, reading unfamiliar words, etc.) we can think of both accuracy and automaticity. The end goal is to have both accuracy and automaticity (students need to correctly and effortlessly lift the words off the page to understand what they read), but accuracy comes first. Accuracy is always our first goal, and as students build skill proficiency and have extended practice with a skill, they develop automaticity so they can perform it quickly and easily without conscious thought.

Syntax

Syntax is the set of rules that dictate how words combine to create meaningful sentences in a language. Imagine it as the construction blueprint for sentences. When students understand these parts of language and the patterns that govern them, it's like having a roadmap for reading—they can understand sentences more easily when they read. When students write, understanding syntax helps them organize their ideas into coherent and effective sentences to clearly communicate their ideas.