



EVIDENCE ADVOCACY CENTER

Literacy Glossary

Accuracy: Reading words without errors; see “fluency.”

Affricate: A consonant sound that begins as a stop with a build-up of air pressure and releases as a fricative (e.g., /ch/, /j/).

Alphabetic Principle: The concept that letters and sounds work together in systematic ways to form words.

Alveolar Ridge: The ridge formed by the gumline behind the upper front teeth; used in the articulation of certain consonant sounds (e.g., /d/, /t/, /n/).

Alveolar: A consonant sound produced by touching the tongue to the alveolar ridge (e.g., /t/, /n/).

Articulation: The production of speech sounds.

Articulatory Gesture: The movement of the vocal tract necessary to produce a particular speech sound (e.g., the popping of the lips to produce /p/).

Auditory Drill: Quick-paced practice of matching sounds (phonemes) to letters or letter combinations (graphemes). Presented with a sound, the student repeats the sound and says the name of its associated letter(s).

Automaticity: Reading words or text without conscious effort or conscious attention to decoding; see “fluency.”

Background Knowledge: A specific subset of knowledge needed to comprehend a particular situation, lesson, or text.

Behavior-Specific Praise: Verbal reinforcement intended to increase the occurrence of a specific behavior; worded to clearly identify the desired behavior.

Bilabial: A sound produced with both lips (e.g., /b/, /p/, /m/).

Blendable Sound: A sound that is pronounced in a manner that facilitates combining it with other sounds. A close approximation of how the sound is produced during the flow of speech. For consonant sounds, this generally entails taking care not to add a schwa or “uh” sound.

Blending Drill: Quick-paced practice in which the student combines the sounds of two or more phonemes to make a word or nonword.

Blending: The task of combining sounds (phonemes) or other sound units (syllables, onset and rime, body and coda) to form words.

Blocked Practice: Performing a single skill repeatedly without practicing other skills; generally less effective than interleaved or mixed practice of several related skills.

Closed Syllable: A syllable with only one vowel, where one or more consonants follow the vowel. The vowel sound is short (cat, cob/web).

Cohesive Devices: Words used to connect ideas within a sentence or text (e.g., pronouns, synonyms, connectives including coordinate and subordinate conjunctions).

Connected Text: Words in sentences, phrases, and paragraphs, as opposed to words in isolation.

Connected Text: Text that includes multiple sentences that are related to one another.

Connected Phonation: Production of individual sounds of a word in such a way as to avoid breaks between sounds; generally employed with continuous sounds (e.g., /ssuuunnn/)

Consonant: A speech sound produced by at least partly obstructing airflow in the vocal tract (e.g., with the lips, tongue, and teeth).

Consonant Blend: Two or more consecutive consonant letters that retain their individual sounds (e.g., bl- in block; -st in last; str- in string).

Consonant Cluster: A combination of two or three consonant letters. This can refer to a consonant blend (each letter represents a separate sound), a consonant digraph or trigraph (letters are combined to make a single sound), or a combination of a digraph with another letter (e.g., shr-, -nch).

Consonant Digraph: Two consecutive consonant letters that represent one phoneme or sound (e.g., ch, sh, ck, ng).

Consonant Trigraph: Three consecutive consonant letters that represent one phoneme, or sound (e.g., -tch, -dge).

Continuous Sound: A sound that can be held out without distortion (e.g., /m/, /s/); also known as continuant (see also “stop sound”).

Contrastive Analysis: A systematic study of two languages (or language variations) with the intent of identifying their structural similarities and differences.

Corrective Feedback: Immediate and supportive teacher response to an incorrect student attempt; intended to modify student thinking to improve learning.

Cumulative Practice: The systematic addition of a new skill to previously learned skills. Students are given opportunities to practice within a session of instruction to learn how to discriminate how and under what conditions a skill is used. Through cumulative practice, long-term retention is built, and accuracy is improved.

Decodable Text or Book: Text in which a high proportion of words (generally at least 80%) include only sound-symbol relationships that have been previously taught.

Decodable Words: Words that contain regular grapheme-phoneme correspondences that were previously taught.

Decoding: The process of translating a word from print to speech; sounding out.

Diagnostic Assessments: Used to assess specific skills or components of reading (such as phonics or fluency) to help educators plan targeted and individualized instruction.

Digraph: A group of two consecutive letters whose phonetic value is a single sound (e.g., ea /ē/ in treat; ph /f/ in graph; ng /ŋ/ in thing).

Diphthong: A vowel produced by the tongue shifting position during articulation; a vowel that feels as if it has two parts, especially the vowels spelled ow, oy, ou, and oi.

Distributed (or Spaced) Practice: Distributing practice over multiple short, spaced sessions and over a longer period of time.

Emergent Bilingual Students (EBs): Students learning English while also developing their first language. This term also promotes the fact that instruction in both languages need to be valued in order to develop them into bilingual students and adults.

Encoding: Spelling, or the ability to translate a word from speech to print.

Encoding: Understanding the spelling of words; a skill that develops reciprocally to decoding when explicitly taught.

English Language Development (ELD): Instruction that is specifically designed for Multilingual Learners to develop their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English.

English Language Varieties: “English language varieties differ in accent, vocabulary, grammar, discourse, sociolinguistics, and have its respective characteristics in pronunciation, tone, intonation, spelling and so on.” (p. 93, Ligang Han, 2019)

Etymology: The history of a word or word part that includes its origin.

Explicit Instruction: Clear, direct, unambiguous teaching that includes frequent checks for understanding, active participation, and success for all students.

Expository Text: Text that provides factual information about a topic.

Fluency: Ability to read words and text accurately, with automaticity and with proper expression. Fluency provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension.

Fricative: A consonant sound produced by forcing air through a constricted space, causing friction or air turbulence (e.g., /f/, /s/, /th/).

Genre: A type of text or literature that has a particular form and style (e.g., poetry, fiction, nonfiction).

Glide: A consonant sound that is similar a vowel sound phonetically but does not function as a vowel in a syllable (e.g., /w/, /y/); “glides” into the subsequent vowel sound; also known as an approximant or semi-vowel.

Glottal: A consonant sound produced by constricting airflow with the glottis (e.g., /h/).

Glottis: The slit-like opening between the vocal folds or vocal cords.

Grapheme: A letter or letter combination that represents a single phoneme; can consist of one, two, three, or four letters in English (e.g., e, ei, igh, eigh).

Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondence (GPC): The matching of a spoken sound (phoneme) to its corresponding letter or group of letters (grapheme); also known as phoneme-grapheme correspondence or, less precisely, letter-sound correspondence.

Guided Practice: Practice of a skill or concept with support and feedback from a teacher or peer.

Hard Palate: The roof of the mouth, or front part of the palate, used to produce palatal sounds (e.g., /sh/, /ch/).

Heart Words: Words that contain irregular grapheme-phoneme correspondences; most parts of these words can be decoded, but some parts must be learned “by heart” (see “irregular words”).

High Frequency Words: A small group of words (300-500) that account for a large percentage of the words in print and can be regular or irregular words (i.e., Dolch or Fry). Often, they are referred to as “sight words” since automatic recognition of these words is required for fluent reading.

Independent Practice: Practice of a skill or concept without support from a teacher or peer.

Inference: Using what you know and parts of text to comprehend what is not directly said in a text.

Intensity: Generally refers to the number of opportunities for student response or practice during instruction; often manipulated by changing the duration/dosage or group size.

Intensive Intervention: Teaching that is longer in duration and provides more opportunities for practice than general whole-class instruction; designed for the purpose of remediating difficulties or areas of weakness; typically delivered in smaller groups or with an individual student; also known as Tier 3 instruction.

Interdental: A consonant sound produced with the tongue between the teeth (e.g., /th/).

Interleaved Practice: Alternating practice among two or more related, accumulated skills within a single session of practice; none of the skills are practiced consecutively. Interleaved practice is generally more effective than “blocked practice” of one skill before moving onto a new skill.

Intervention: Instruction designed for the purpose of remediating difficulties or areas of weakness.

Irregular Word: A word that is not decodable because it contains uncommon grapheme-phoneme correspondences or phonic patterns (e.g., said, who, people). See also “permanently irregular words” and “temporarily irregular words.”

Labiodental: A consonant sound produced by touching the bottom lip to the upper teeth (e.g., /f/, /v/).

Lax Vowel Sound: A vowel produced with minimal tension of the vocal cords, slightly lower tongue positions, and slightly shorter durations. Often referred to as a “short” vowel (e.g., cat, pin).

Liquid: A consonant sound produced when the tongue creates a partial closure in the mouth; similar a vowel sound phonetically but does not function as a vowel in a syllable (e.g., /l/, /r/).

Long Vowel: A term used by educators to denote a tense vowel sound.

Manipulative Letters: Letters that can be moved to form and change words (e.g., magnetic letter, letter tiles); used to make the abstract concepts of phoneme blending and segmentation more concrete for students.

Metacognition: Developing an interactive approach with text to recognize when a text does not make sense and have options to know what to do about it.

Modeling: Teacher demonstration of a new strategy, skill, or concept.

Morpheme: The smallest unit of meaning in language; includes prefixes, suffixes, and roots.

Morphology: The system of meaningful parts, or morphemes, that make up words.

Multilingual Learners:

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS): A framework for school improvement that ensures all students are supported to meet positive academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes beginning with core instruction in Tier 1 and interventions at increasing intensity at Tiers 2 and 3.

Multisyllabic Word: Word that contains more than one syllable. See “syllable.”

Narrative Text: Text that relates a series of events; this can include both fiction and nonfiction.

Nasal: A sound produced by restricting air from being released through the mouth, instead releasing it through the nasal cavity (e.g., /m/, /n/, /ŋ/); nasals often affect the sound of a preceding vowel (e.g., /am/).

Nasal Cavity: The opening above the palate and behind the nose; used to produce nasal sounds (e.g., /m/, /n/, /ŋ/).

Nasalized Vowel: A vowel sound that is produced when air passes through the nose and the mouth simultaneously (e.g., /an/).

Nonsense Word: A combination of sounds that is pronounceable but does not have meaning; also called a pseudoword or nonword.

Onset-Rime Division: Dividing a syllable before the vowel sound (i.e., between the onset and rime)(e.g., between the /fl/ and /ăsh/ in flash).

Onset: An intrasyllabic unit that includes any consonant or combination of consonant sounds occurring before the vowel (e.g., the /fl/ in flash); see “intrasyllabic unit.”

Open Syllable: A syllable with only one vowel, which is the last letter in the syllable. The vowel sound is long (he, silo).

Opportunities to Respond (OTR): Teacher behaviors that elicit student responses; thought to promote knowledge or skill acquisition; also known as opportunities for practice.

Orthographic Mapping: A cognitive process of learning to read words by sight and spell word by memory during which grapheme-phoneme connections secure the spellings, pronunciations, and meanings of specific words in memory for automatic retrieval.

Palatal: A consonant sound produced by touching the tongue to the hard palate, or roof of the mouth (e.g., /sh/, /ch/).

Permanently Irregular Word: A word with grapheme-phoneme correspondences that are unique to that word or a few words. See “irregular words.”

Phoneme: The smallest unit of sound within a spoken language that distinguishes one word from another; also considered to be not only the sound itself, but the physical act used to produce it. See “articulatory gesture.”

Phonemic Awareness: The ability to notice, think about, or manipulate the individual phonemes (sounds) in words; the ability to understand that sounds in spoken language work together to make words. This term is used to refer to the most sophisticated level of phonological awareness: awareness of individual phonemes in words.

Phonetics: The study of speech sounds as physical events, including how sounds are formed or generated in the vocal tract and how one sound can be distinguished from others and categorized.

Phonic Decoding: The process of sounding out words using letter-sound knowledge and blending those sounds together to pronounce the word. In the research literature, this process is referred to as phonological recoding or simply recoding.

Phonics: The study of the relationships between letters and the sounds they represent; also used to describe reading instruction that teaches sound-symbol correspondences.

Phonological Awareness: Conscious awareness of or sensitivity to, or explicit awareness of, the sound structure of words in language. This “umbrella” term includes awareness of various levels of phonological structure in language, including awareness of words, syllables, intrasyllabic units, and individual phonemes.

Phonology: The study of the sound system of language, focused on the study of phonemes and how they function in language; includes the identification of phonemes of a language and the rules that govern their pronunciation.

Prefix: A morpheme that comes before a root and that contributes to or modifies its meaning (e.g., pre in preview; un in unhappy).

Progress Monitoring: More frequent assessments given to students receiving intervention that measure progress toward acquiring specific skills.

Prosody: Reading smoothly with expression and intonation that represents the meaning and comprehension of connected text.

R-controlled Vowel: A vowel that is followed by an r. The vowel is not long or short. The vowel is said to be controlled by the r (e.g., start, corner).

Regular Words: Any word in which each grapheme represents its most common phoneme (e.g., mop, ship).

Reliable: The extent to which assessments are consistent over time within the same settings with the same type of subjects.

Retrieval Practice (Testing Practice): A teaching/learning practice to build retention and retrieval of information. Often material is practiced in a repeated manner without seeing/having it in front of you (e.g., self-testing yourself using flashcards, worksheets, quizzes, etc.). Retrieval practice is from memory without teacher prompts or cues.

Rime: An intrasyllabic unit that includes the vowel and any consonant or combination of consonant sounds occurring after the vowel (e.g., the /ăsh/ in flash); see “intrasyllabic unit.”

Root: A bound morpheme, usually of Latin origin, that is not a word on its own (e.g., rupt, ject); gives a word its principal meaning. See “base word.”

Schwa: A quick, unstressed, neutral vowel pronunciation very close to a 'short u' /ʌ/. The purpose of schwa is to allow unstressed syllables to be said more quickly.

Scope and Sequence: The representation of the content and organization or order of a curriculum, or what is taught and in what order.

Screening/Screeners: Brief assessments given to all students to determine which students are at risk of struggling with reading.

Segmenting: Breaking spoken language into smaller units of sound (sentences into words and words into syllables, intrasyllabic units, or phonemes).

Short Vowel: A term used by educators to denote a lax vowel sound.

Sight Word: A word that is recognized immediately (i.e., “on sight”); recognition generally occurs after orthographic mapping; these words may be phonetically regular or irregular. Not to be confused with “high-frequency words.”

Signal Word(s): Words that signal readers as to the text type. For example, signal words for cause and effect texts include *for*, *because*, and *as a result* whereas signal words for problem and solution texts include *however*, *in contrast*, and *on the other hand*.

Soft Palate: Back part of the palate or roof of the mouth; also known as the velum.

Sound Boxes (also called Elkonin Boxes): A method for phonemic awareness instruction developed by the Russian psychologist D.B. Elkonin, in which chips are moved into boxes to represent phonemes or sounds in a word. In phonics instruction, the teacher can draw one box per sound for a target word and guide the student in writing the letter or letter combinations that represent each sound in the box.

Sound-Symbol Correspondences: The relationship between a grapheme, or printed letter(s), and its corresponding phoneme, or individual speech sound (i.e., <c> can correspond to the phoneme /k/ or /s/).

Spaced Practice: Practice that occurs over time.

Spelling Patterns: Combinations of graphemes that occur in multiple words, including patterns such as consonant digraphs (e.g., sh, ck), vowel digraphs (e.g., ai, oa), other vowel teams (e.g., igh, ough), word families (e.g., -at, -ink), or final stable syllable patterns (e.g., -consonant-le, -tion, -cious).

Standardized: Administered and scored in a consistent manner.

Stop Sound: A sound that is produced by completely stopping the air stream. A stop sound can only be said for an instant, otherwise its sound will be distorted (i.e., / b/, /c/ /d/, /g/, /h/, /j/, /k/, /p/, /q/, /t/, /x/). Words beginning with stop sounds are more difficult for students to blend than words beginning with a continuous sound.

Suffix: An affix attached to the end of a base, root, or stem that changes the meaning or grammatical function of the word, as “en” in oxen.

Syllable: A word or a part of a word with one vowel sound; some syllables in words with two or more syllables may contain a syllabic consonant instead of a vowel (e.g., prism).

Syllable Types: There are six patterns commonly recognized as syllable types: (a) **Closed:** cat, cobweb; (b) **Open:** he, silo; (c) **Vowel-consonant-e (VCE):** like, milestone; (d) **R-controlled:** star, corner; (e) **Vowel team:** count, rainbow; and (f) **Final stable:** -Cle (as in candle), -tion, -ture, -cian.

Syntax: The arrangement of words to form sentences in a given language.

Systematic Instruction: Teaching that is logically sequenced, builds on prior knowledge, and proceeds in manageable steps.

Temporarily Irregular Word: A word with grapheme-phoneme correspondences that a particular student has not yet learned. See “irregular words.”

Tense Vowel Sound: A vowel produced with tension of the vocal cords, slightly higher tongue positions, and slightly longer durations. Often referred to as a “long” vowel (e.g., rain, kite).

Trigraph: Three consecutive letters that represent one phoneme, or sound (e.g., tch, dge, igh).

Types of Text:

- **Decodable:** Texts with a high proportion of phonetically regular words matched to common letter-sound relationships previously taught in phonics lessons within accompanying teacher guides.
- **Leveled:** Texts leveled according to a gradient of difficulty based on multiple supportive features of the

whole *text*, which allows for an emphasis on meaning, such as text structure, themes and ideas, or language and literary features.

- *Predictable*: Texts with predictable text structures such as repetitive and predictable sentences, words, and phrases.

Unvoiced: A sound produced without vibration in the vocal cords (e.g., /s/, /t/); also known as voiceless.

Valid: The extent to which an assessment is accurate (i.e., whether or not it measures what it is supposed to measure).

Variant Vowels: Groups of letters that produce the same vowel sound (e.g., ai, ay, eigh).

Velar: A consonant sound produced by raising the back of the tongue to the velum, or soft palate (e.g., /g/, /k/, /ŋ/).

Velum: Back part of the palate or roof of the mouth; also known as the soft palate.

Visual Drill: Quick-paced practice of matching letters or letter combinations (graphemes) to sounds (phonemes). Presented with a grapheme, the student says its name and its associated phonemes(s).

Vocal Cords: Ligaments that stretch across the interior of the larynx and vibrate to produce sounds; also known as vocal folds.

Vocal Folds: Ligaments that stretch across the interior of the larynx that vibrate to produce sounds; also known as vocal cords.

Voiced: A sound produced with vibration in the vocal cords (e.g., /m/, /b/).

Vowel Digraph: Two vowels together that represent one phoneme, or sound (e.g., ea, ai, oa).

Vowel Team: A combination of letters that, together, represent one vowel sound. Can be a vowel digraph (e.g., ai, ea), a diphthong (e.g., oi, ou), or a longer combination that can include consonant letters (e.g., igh, ough).

Vowel: A speech sound produced without obstruction of airflow, with vibration of the vocal cords.

Word Chain: In word work, an exercise where one sound-symbol correspondence is changed from one word to the next (e.g., mat to sat, sat to sap, sap to sip, etc.). See “word work.”

Word Work: The act of deliberately analyzing words, generally for practice in decoding or encoding.