

# LETRS® and the SIPPS® Program

LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) is professional learning that helps “educators understand ‘how’ students learn to read and write, recognize the reasons ‘why’ some students struggle, and determine ‘what’ must be taught to increase student success.” (Moats 2018, 2) LETRS was developed by Dr. Louisa Moats and Dr. Carol Tolman. In the interview “A Conversation about the Science of Reading and Early Reading Instruction with Dr. Louisa Moats,” Dr. Moats shares her thoughts on the recent resurgence of the science of reading research. She discusses the LETRS training and states that “LETRS empowers teachers to understand the what, why, and how of scientifically based reading instruction. We focus on teaching priority skills such as phonology, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension that need to be taught during reading and spelling lessons to obtain the best results for all students. The reason we focus on those priority skills is that effective reading instruction is complex, with several related key components that are informed by scientific research. The way we help teachers apply this knowledge is by demonstrating instructional routines, activities, and approaches that will allow them to address the needs of all their students.”

The *SIPPS* (*Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words*) program, developed by Dr. John Shefelbine, is a multilevel curriculum that teaches the word-recognition strategies and skills that enable students to become independent and confident readers and writers. In the interview mentioned above, Dr. Moats also shares her thoughts on how complementary the *SIPPS* program can be to the LETRS training for teachers. She says the following:

“*SIPPS* has something that I’m always looking for in programs: The authors understand phonology and the distinguishing features of classes of phonemes, which is so important because certain speech sounds can be easily confused with other speech sounds, and the instruction needs to teach children how to distinguish these sounds without overloading them with too much information.

“In lesson after lesson in *SIPPS*, I saw examples of the authors’ understanding of the content as well as a deep appreciation for explicit instructional techniques.

“...the *SIPPS* scope and sequence is really well informed from a linguistic standpoint, and everything is as clear as can be.” (Stuart and Fugnitto, 2020)

Combining the science of reading with high-quality professional learning and curriculum is the formula for empowering teachers to meet the needs of every reader. The *SIPPS* program addresses the word recognition strand of Scarborough’s Reading Rope, providing a curriculum solution that allows teachers to apply the LETRS learning.

The following table notes the elements of LETRS training aligned to the *SIPPS* program.

Phonological Awareness

Oral phonological awareness should be taught for a few minutes each day, equipping students to distinguish different speech sounds (phonemes), ultimately mapping the sounds to written symbols (graphemes/ letters) for reading and spelling.

Oral phonological awareness activities in every lesson in *SIPPS* Beginning, Extension, and Plus train the students to hear and distinguish phonemes.

**Examples:**

1. Excerpt of an oral phonological awareness activity from the *SIPPS Beginning Level Teacher’s Manual*:

**ORAL BLENDING OF PHONEMES**

(Say the sounds continuously.) “Blend.”

**Background**

Say each word slowly for the students. Be sure to hold or extend the continuous sounds for 2 seconds. For students who have difficulty learning to blend sounds, it is especially important for you to hold continuous sounds and blend them in succession without stopping or pausing between sounds. For example, *man* is sounded as /mmäänn/, not /mm//ää//nn/.

Blending words that start with stop sounds is more difficult for students. One way to scaffold blending words like *tan* is for you to say the first two sounds separately (“t//ää/”) and then blend them together to make a syllable (“tää/”) that is extended. You then say “Sound” and have the students say “tää/” as you sweep under *t* and hold on *a* and then blend it continuously with the last sound as you move to it. For example: “t//ää/, /tää/. Sound.” (Students: “täänn/”)

2. Video: [Oral Blending of Phonemes: had](#)
3. Professional learning support for [Continuous Blending](#) in the *Teacher Learning System*, accessed through the Learning Portal.\*

The screenshot shows the 'Teacher Learning System' interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Welcome', 'SIPPS', 'Being a Reader Small-Group Reading', and 'Caring School Community'. Below this, the main content area is titled 'Continuous Blending'. It includes a section for 'Blending Decodable Words' Routines, a sub-section for 'Continuous Blending', and a section for 'Using the Story Chart During the "Reading a Story" Routine'. The main text explains that in *SIPPS* Beginning, the teacher and students use continuous blending for phonological awareness and reading decodable words. It provides examples and instructions on how to perform continuous blending. Below the text, there are bullet points for manual sections to read and videos to watch. At the bottom, there are reflection questions for the user to consider.

\*If you do not have access to the Learning Portal, sign up for a free 60-day trial license at <https://info.collaborativeclassroom.org/trial>.

**Phonological Awareness** *(continued)*

Instruction that stimulates accurate and efficient phonological processing should be multisensory, actively engaging students' ears, mouths, and hands.


Visual-auditory-vocal links are stressed in all *SIPPS* lessons. Students who have learning challenges may benefit from simultaneous activation of learning modalities that include physical movement and tactile sensations. For these students, the *Intensive Multisensory Instruction for SIPPS Handbook* provides variations that can be readily added to the original *SIPPS* routines.

**Examples:**

Excerpt from the *SIPPS Beginning Level Teacher's Manual*:

**Preparation**

Print the visual cue from the Learning Portal or draw blanks on the board representing the number of phonemes in the words you will blend. For both the **A** and **B** lists in this lesson, draw three blanks. Draw a left-to-right arrow of a different color underneath the blanks.



**A** had, hid, mud, did, tan

**B** mad, had, nut, hit, dad

Excerpt from the *Intensive Multisensory Instruction for SIPPS Handbook*:

**Process**

Use the routine for “Oral Blending of Phonemes” found in Appendix A, “Routines” on pages 464–466 of the *Beginning Level Teacher's Manual* with the addition that follows.

Distribute the “Phonological Awareness Visual Cue” page to each student. Tell the students that after you say the sounds, they will repeat the sounds while making the same hand motions on their copies of the visual cue as you make on the board. They will point to the left of the blanks and sweep and pause as they say the phonemes. Then they will point to the left again and sweep to the right as they say the whole word.

**Example** *(using man)*

*You:* “I will say the sounds in a word. Then you will say the sounds while you point to each blank the way I do on the board.”

- > Point to the blanks on the board while sounding “mmäänn.”
- > (The students repeat “mmäänn” while pointing on their page to one blank for each sound.)

*You:* “Blend.”

- > (The students say “man” while sweeping under the blanks on their page as you do on the board.)

Elements of LETRS Training	SIPPS
<b>Phonological Awareness</b> <i>(continued)</i>	
<p>Phonological awareness activities should be well chosen and follow a developmental continuum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early phonological awareness (rhyming, syllable work, alliteration, and onset-rime)</li> <li>• Basic phonological awareness (blending and segmenting phonemes)</li> <li>• Advanced phonological awareness (phoneme deletion, substitution, and reversal)</li> </ul>	<p><i>SIPPS</i> phonological awareness activities follow a developmental continuum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early phonological awareness activities include blending onset-rimes and recognizing and producing rhyming words</li> <li>• Basic phonological awareness activities include blending and segmenting onset-rimes, words, syllables and phonemes</li> <li>• Advanced phonological awareness activities include manipulating phonemes through deletion and substitution</li> </ul> <p>Click <a href="#">here</a> to review the scope and sequence charts.</p>
<b>Alphabetic Principle (Spelling-Sound Correspondences)</b>	
<p>Success with word reading depends upon each student's ability to connect phonemes to graphemes and blend the sounds quickly to form words.</p>	<p>The <i>SIPPS</i> lessons use a consistent, multicomponent approach that provides opportunities for students to develop the spelling-sound correspondence and apply that learning to word reading, text reading, and writing.</p>

**Alphabetic Principle (Spelling-Sound Correspondences) *(continued)***






Decoding is multifaceted and requires a systematic and explicit phonics instructional framework to teach students how to decode new and previously unknown words in isolation and in context.

SIPPS spelling-sound correspondence activities include:

- Introduction and review of spelling-sounds
- Word reading
- Practice dictation through a guided spelling routine
- Application and fluency practice through reading connected text

**Examples:**

1. Video: [Introduce Spelling-Sound Relationships: h](#)
2. Excerpt from *SIPPS Beginning Level Teacher’s Manual*:

Instruction <i>(using the word am as an example)</i>		
	Point to the left of the arrow and pause.	You: “Sound.”
	Sweep your finger under the spellings, holding under each of the continuous sounds for 2 seconds. Do not break between sounds.	Students: “/ăămm/”
	Point again to the left of the arrow and pause.	You: “Again.”
	Sweep your finger under the spellings, holding under each of the continuous sounds for 2 seconds.	Students: “/ăămm/”
	Point again to the left of the arrow and pause.	You: “Read.”

3. Video used during guided spelling: [Dictation of Decodable Words: fit](#)

Decoding and encoding are firmly connected and require students to employ a strategy for handling single-syllable as well as multisyllabic words. A strategy for decoding multisyllabic words builds students’ efficient decoding abilities and prevents students from developing an overreliance on the use of context to decode words. The strategy includes analysis and marking of vowels in syllables, affixes, syllable types, and morphology.

The decoding work in the *SIPPS* program gets increasingly more complex as students transition to Extension Level—or later lessons in Plus—with instruction in polysyllabic strategies, including analysis and marking of vowels in syllables, syllable types, and morphology.

Elements of LETRS Training	SIPPS
<b>Sight Recognition</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readers must be able to read and spell both regular and irregular words with automaticity.</li> <li>• 3–5 words to learn by sight are introduced each week, and multisensory and visualization techniques are used to maximize learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Techniques incorporate fine motor, large motor, and visual imagery for word learning</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Teachers should draw attention to the irregular part of a word by marking the irregularity with a heart that serves as mnemonic. This strategy also allows the regular graphemes of the word to be processed phonologically.</li> <li>• Distributed practice allows for daily review of words to increase word automaticity.</li> <li>• Personalized sight word deck for practice includes words that are instantly and effortlessly recognized by the student; should consist of both regularly and irregularly spelled words.</li> </ul>	<p>Sight recognition of words and high-frequency words that are regular and irregular are given specific, daily instructional emphasis as part of the multicomponent lesson framework of <i>SIPPS</i> as well through a consistent instructional routine in its lessons.</p> <p>Sight recognition activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to new word(s)</li> <li>• Review of previously learned words</li> <li>• Use of a read-spell-read routine</li> <li>• Practice dictation through a guided spelling routine</li> <li>• Application and fluency practice through reading connected text</li> </ul> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Video: <a href="#">Introduce Sight Words: see</a></li> <li>2. Video: <a href="#">Dictation of Sight Words: and</a></li> <li>3. Excerpt from the <i>Intensive Multisensory Instruction for SIPPS Handbook</i>:</li> </ol> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>INTRODUCE SIGHT WORDS: SPELL AND MOVE</b></p> <p>This activity incorporates movement to increase awareness of each letter in a sight word. The students tap a finger of one hand onto the palm of the other hand as they spell the sight word. “Introduce Sight Words” is introduced in Lesson 1A and appears in most lessons of <i>Beginning Level</i>.</p> <p><b>Preparation</b></p> <p>Gather the sight word cards for the review words in the day’s lesson.</p> <p><b>Process</b></p> <p>Have the students read, spell, read, spell, and read each word, tapping their palm with a finger of the other hand as they say each letter on the card.</p> </div>
<b>Fluency</b>	
<p>Sight recognition of words is critical for fluent reading since fluency is a measure of automatic word reading. Appropriate accuracy and rate allow the reader to focus on meaning.</p>	<p>The goal of the <i>SIPPS</i> program is the development of independent, fluent readers who read with accuracy and automaticity. The <i>SIPPS</i> lessons include differentiated fluency practice as part of the daily instructional framework.</p>

Elements of LETRS Training	SIPPS
<b>Fluency</b> <i>(continued)</i>	
<p>Language and vocabulary deficits harm fluency. Reading rates can be impeded when there is confusion as to which sounds belong to which grapheme and a limited number of words are known.</p>	<p><i>SIPPS</i> fluency practice includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word reading practice</li> <li>• Application and fluency practice through reading connected text</li> <li>• Fluency practice through independent reading</li> </ul> <p>Additional support and considerations are provided to teachers in Appendix B, “Fluency Practice” of the <i>SIPPS Teacher’s Manual</i> as well as in the <i>Teacher Learning System</i> on the Learning Portal.*</p> <p>* If you do not have access to the Learning Portal, sign up for a free 60-day trial license at <a href="https://info.collaborativeclassroom.org/trial">https://info.collaborativeclassroom.org/trial</a>.</p>
<p>Teachers employ fluency work that addresses punctuation and phrasing as well as utilizes speed drills, phrase-cued oral reading, simultaneous oral reading, partner reading, and repeated readings.</p>	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>Excerpt from the <i>SIPPS Extension Level Teacher’s Manual</i>:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>FLUENCY PRACTICE/INDIVIDUALIZED DAILY READING</b></p> <p><b>Rationale</b></p> <p>There are three components to fluency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Accuracy: reading words accurately</li> <li>▶ Automaticity: reading words quickly and easily without having to slowly sound them out</li> <li>▶ Prosody: reading with expression and proper phrasing</li> </ul> <p>A major goal of <b>SIPPS</b> Extension Level is to have students become automatic readers, which will enable them to read silently with higher levels of comprehension. Non-automatic readers need to read aloud<sup>3</sup> and are less likely to understand what they read because so much of their attention is devoted to decoding. Students build fluency and develop confidence by applying their decoding skills and sight-word knowledge to teacher-monitored, individual reading. For more information on fluency, see “The Development of Reading Fluency” on page 464.</p> <p>In Lessons 1-23, the students read decodable text from the Extension Level <i>Story Book</i> during Fluency Practice. At first, the students read for 20 minutes; in Lessons 24-40, the students read for 30 minutes from easy-to-read trade books. (See page 419 in Appendix B, “Fluency Practice/Individualized Daily Reading,” for a list of recommended series.)</p> <p><b>SIPPS</b> Extension Level has two kinds of reading practice activities: Fluency Practice and Individualized Daily Reading (IDR).</p> </div>

Elements of LETRS Training	SIPPS
<b>Fluency</b> <i>(continued)</i>	
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;"> <p><i>Fluency Practice</i> involves the students reading quietly aloud to themselves while being monitored by you, the teacher. This activity is for nonautomatic readers, who read slowly because they need to take time to sound out words. As the students read, you circulate through the class, making sure all the students are reading, and also listening to each student and recording accuracy and your observations on the student’s Fluency Record sheet (page 501). You will use this time to check that the student’s reading accuracy is 95-100 percent. Beginning in Lesson 16, you will also calculate the students’ reading rates to determine whether they have become automatic and can begin reading silently.</p> <p><i>Individualized Daily Reading (IDR)</i> entails students reading silently to themselves with a greater emphasis on comprehension. IDR is for students who are automatic, which we define as being able to read unpracticed, primary-level narratives at or above 60 correct words per minute (cwpm) with 95-100 percent accuracy. As in <i>Fluency Practice</i>, you circulate among the students, checking on accuracy and rate as well as monitoring their comprehension.</p> <p>Note that some of the students in your class may be engaged in <i>Fluency Practice</i> while others will be doing <i>Individualized Daily Reading</i>. For more about <i>Fluency Practice</i> and <i>Individualized Daily Reading</i>, see Appendix B, “<i>Fluency Practice/Individualized Daily Reading</i>.”</p> </div>

**References**

Moats, Louisa, “Literacy PD: 10 Reasons Why It’s Essential,” whitepaper, Voyager Sopris Learning and Lexia, 2018, [www.voyagersopris.com/docs/default-source/professional-development/leters/leters\\_top-10-white-paper\\_8-31-18.pdf?sfvrsn=4233f285\\_4](http://www.voyagersopris.com/docs/default-source/professional-development/leters/leters_top-10-white-paper_8-31-18.pdf?sfvrsn=4233f285_4)

Stuart, Kelly and Fugnitto, Gina, “A Conversation About the Science of Reading and Early Reading Instruction with Dr. Louisa Moats,” Collaborative Circle Blog, 2020, [www.collaborativeclassroom.org/blog/a-conversation-about-the-science-of-reading-with-dr-louisa-moats/](http://www.collaborativeclassroom.org/blog/a-conversation-about-the-science-of-reading-with-dr-louisa-moats/)

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