



CHAPTER 1

Word Identification in Your Classroom Reading Program



This chapter explains the proper place of word identification in your classroom reading program. You will learn about methods we use to teach word identification, how children read words, and how to determine the most appropriate balance between word identification and other components of the reading program. You will come to understand metacognition and learn how to encourage readers to keep word identification meaning-focused by monitoring their own comprehension, correcting their own word identification mistakes,

and cross-checking to make sure that the words they identify fit the reading context. You will also learn how children use a combination of language and letter and sound cues to read words, the stages of word learning, and why understanding these stages is important for teaching children to read and learn new words.

KEY IDEAS

- ▶ Emphasis on word identification should be in proportion to children's individual needs.
- ▶ Phonics helps children develop rich reading vocabularies, contributes to reading fluency, and supports reading independence.
- ▶ Readers may use a combination of letter and sound, sentence structure (syntactic), and meaning (semantic) cues to read new words.
- ▶ Metacognitive awareness—reflecting on and being aware of personal knowledge, strategies, and skills—is important for using phonics to read and learn new words.
- ▶ Cross-checking helps readers make sure that the words they identify fit the reading context.
- ▶ Readers monitor their own reading to detect word identification mistakes or miscues.
- ▶ When readers realize that a word does not fit the reading context, they self-correct to fix their word identification miscue.
- ▶ Children read words by analogy, letter-sound decoding, analyzing word structure, predicting, or instantly on sight.
- ▶ Word learning develops in predictable stages. With an understanding of how word learning develops, you will teach exactly what children need to know to add new words to their reading vocabularies.

KEY VOCABULARY

- Alphabetic principle
- Analogy-based phonics
- Analytic phonics
- Cross-checking
- Embedded phonics
- Letter-sound phonics
- Meaning (semantic) cues
- Metacognitive awareness
- Self-correcting
- Self-monitoring
- Sentence structure (syntactic) cues
- Spelling-based phonics
- Synthetic phonics

As a proficient reader, you instantly recognize the words you commonly encounter when reading. Instead of figuring out words, you focus on comprehension. This is exactly as it should be. However, consider what it is like for young readers who come across many unfamiliar words. Meeting a large number of new words is a major impediment to comprehension, and so it is not surprising that these children concentrate on developing their reading vocabularies.

Consider the note in Figure 1-1 written by Maria. If you speak and read Spanish, Maria's message is crystal clear. The words are easy to recognize, the sentences are well formed, and you know why the picture and the message are a perfect match. Suppose instead that you speak Spanish but cannot read it. Now the format of the note and Maria's drawing are the only reliable clues to meaning. You might make an educated guess based on information gleaned from the picture and your own background knowledge. From the heart-shaped drawing, you might logically infer that this is either a valentine or a love letter. But unless you recognize the words Maria wrote, your grasp of meaning is limited, and your comprehension is at best an approximation of Maria's message.

To go beyond supposition, you must learn the same things beginning readers learn—how to use phonics and the multiletter groups, or chunks, in word structure (the *-er* in *sharper*) to read new words. Just recognizing words is not

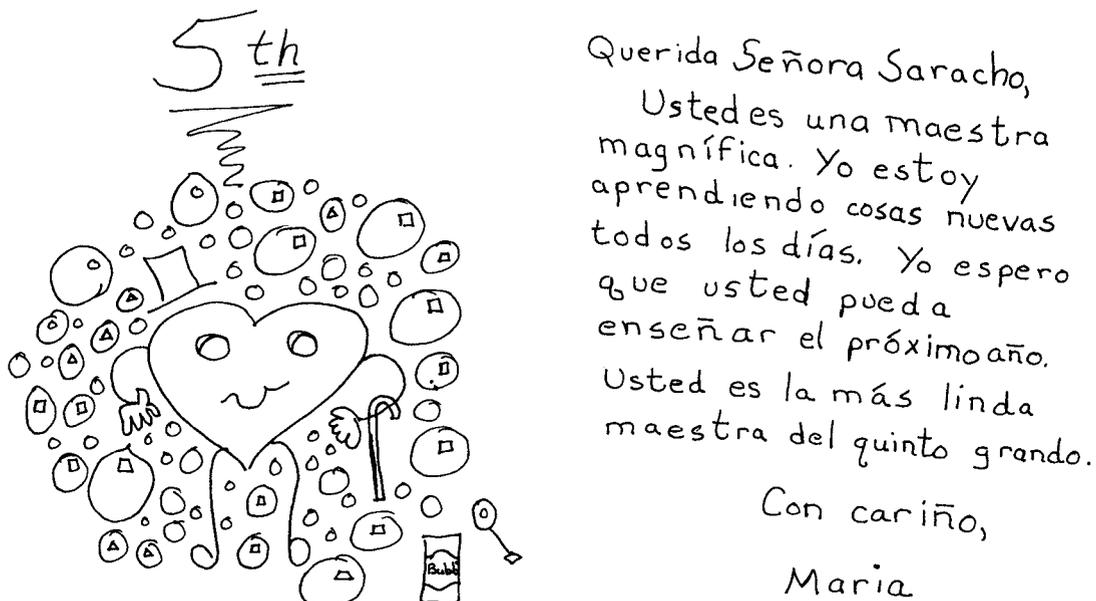


Figure 1-1 Maria's note: Can you get the message?

enough; you must also know the meaning of the words Maria wrote, understand the sentence structure, and appreciate the social context in which notes such as this are written and read. (See the translation of Maria's note at the end of this chapter.)

WHY DO WE TEACH PHONICS?

Written English uses the **alphabetic principle**. This is the principle of using letters to represent sounds. An alphabetic writing system makes it possible for any reader who knows the code to pronounce words the reader has never seen in print before. *Phonics* is the relationship between the letters and sounds and approaches for teaching these relationships. Letter-sound relationships are a set of visual directions—a map, if you will—telling readers how to pronounce new words they have never seen before. You teach phonics when you demonstrate that the letter *b* represents the sound heard at the beginning of /banana/¹, /boat/, and /bubble/. In helping children compare and contrast the sounds represented by the letters in *hid* and *hide*, you are teaching phonics. When you challenge readers to think about a word that begins with *c*, ends with *t*, and makes sense in the sentence *Mark's _____ eats tuna fish*, you are a teacher of phonics. And when you encourage writers to spell a word “the way it sounds,” you help children think about and analyze our alphabetic writing system, which is what you do when you teach phonics.

Phonics makes it easier to read and learn new words. Good decoders know more words (Eldredge, 2005) and read faster than poor decoders. If you teach first grade, you can expect the good decoders in your classroom to read twice as fast as their classmates with poor phonics skills. By the end of first grade, good decoders will read twice as much as poor readers in the same amount of time. This affords twice as many opportunities for better readers to read known and new words, and to develop larger reading vocabularies. One advantage of phonics is it takes a relatively small amount of letter and sound information to identify and learn a large number of words. For instance, the children in your class who know the sounds that *t* and *ur* represent can figure out the pronunciation of words that share these letters, such as *turn*, *hurt*, and *turtle*. Phonics is a bridge between the spoken words children already know and the written words they do not recognize. In using phonics, readers identify unfamiliar words by associating sounds with letters. Remembering how the letters in written words represent sounds in spoken words helps children remember words. The more children read and write the same words, the stronger their memory becomes and the faster they recognize the words (Ehri, 2006). Eventually the sounds, spellings, and meanings of words are joined together in memory. Children then recognize words instantly, at a glance, without conscious effort or attention. Instant word recognition includes information on the word's spelling, sound, and meaning.

¹ In this book, for simplicity, instead of using a standard system of phonetic symbols, letters that typically stand for sounds are used and placed between slashes (/ /). Single vowels represent short-vowel sounds, while long-vowel sounds are either described as such, identified by spelling pattern (*ou*, *ee*), or indicated by the use of a macron (ˉ).

Phonics makes an important contribution to fluent reading. Good decoders are more fluent readers than poor decoders (Schwanenflugel, Hamilton, Kuhn, Wisenbaker, & Stahl, 2004). Accurate, expressive, fluent reading is possible only when readers instantly and accurately recognize the words in text (Eldredge, 2005). Let us consider why instant word recognition is so important for fluent reading. Effortless word recognition frees the mind to think about reading expressively. Freeing the mind from attention to individual words is important because attention is limited. Readers can pay attention to meaning or they can pay attention to figuring out words, but they cannot do both things at once. Because readers do not have to focus on identifying the words, they can concentrate on reading fluently and comprehending text. In fact, fluent reading is not possible without instant word recognition. You may encounter a few good decoders who cannot read fluently, but you will never encounter a fluent reader who does not instantly recognize the words in text. Readers who do not immediately recognize words have several choices, none of them conducive to fluent reading. Readers might skip words, stop to decode them, or guess. In so doing, readers change the focus from reading in meaningful phrases with expression to decoding or guessing. This, of course, disrupts expressive, fluent reading and interferes with comprehension.

Phonics affects fluency as early as the first grade. Developing expressive, accurate, fluent reading in first grade is important. Once the trajectory toward fluency is established, children seem to stay on the same course unless the classroom reading program is adjusted to provide more reading instruction. High-fluency readers at the end of first grade are high-fluency readers at the end of the second grade; low-fluency readers at the end of first grade are likely to be low-fluency readers at the end of second grade.

Phonics is also important for developing fluency and supporting comprehension, but phonics does not make children fluent readers or good comprehenders, as we see in Figure 1-2. Like all complex tasks, fluent reading is based on several more basic skills. The basic skills must be in place or developing appropriately in order for readers to carry out complex tasks. Phonics is one of the basic skills. Phonemic awareness is another basic skill, as discussed in Chapter 2. Although knowing phonics does not automatically result in fluent reading, it is a critical basic skill. Phonics is a tool for learning words. Knowing words, in turn, makes it possible to read fluently. So, we see that phonics contributes directly to developing a large vocabulary of instantly recognized words. A large vocabulary of instantly recognized words, in turn, supports comprehension and makes it possible to read fluently (Eldredge, 2005).

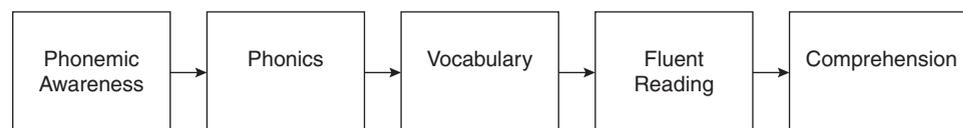


Figure 1-2 The relationship of phonics to vocabulary and fluency.

Figure constructed from the findings of Eldredge (2005) and Schwanenflugel, Hamilton, Kuhn, Wisenbaker, & Stahl (2004).

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PHONICS INSTRUCTION IN YOUR CLASSROOM READING PROGRAM

Your classroom reading program will be successful when you teach phonics directly, systematically, early, and meaningfully, and when children have many opportunities to use their letter-sound knowledge in reading and writing. Let us consider these five characteristics of phonics in a successful classroom reading program.

1. *Teach phonics directly* Effective classroom teachers teach phonics directly. In direct instruction you, the teacher, explain, model, and demonstrate how to use phonics when reading and spelling. Children then practice under your guidance. Should children encounter difficulty, you are there ready to help them use phonics and correctly apply information. If children need more instruction, this is the time to provide further explanation and additional demonstration of how to use phonics. Last, as children become more skilled, you gradually withdraw your support, until finally children are successful on their own, without your assistance.
2. *Teach phonics systematically* Systematic phonics instruction follows a scope and sequence. It leaves nothing to chance. It is important to have an overall plan for teaching all the important letter-sound relationships of phonics, to teach in a logical sequence, to make sure the plan is implemented, and to ensure that all children have the opportunities they need to be successful in learning useful letter-sound relationships. In teaching systematically, you, the teacher, know what to teach and when to teach it. Following a carefully crafted scope and sequence ensures that children learn what they need to know to use phonics to help them build a large reading vocabulary that underpins comprehension and fluency. Systematic, sequential instruction also gives you a basis for forming flexible skill groups if some children are behind or ahead of their classmates in learning and for teaching precisely what children need to learn to become efficient, effective readers.
3. *Teach phonics early* By early, we mean beginning in kindergarten or first grade, well before children are independent readers (National Reading Panel, 2000).
4. *Keep phonics instruction meaningful* It is important to teach phonics within the context of words that illustrate certain phonics letter-sound relationships and patterns (see Chapter 5). But it is also important to select words for phonics lessons that are important for everyday reading and spelling. Capitalize on the naturally occurring opportunities for children to learn and use phonics by weaving phonics into the ongoing activities in your classroom. Look for ways children can use their phonics knowledge while sharing literature and reading library books and content area books, and then point out words in these texts that are examples of the phonics letter-sound relationships and patterns children are learning.
5. *Support children as they use phonics while reading and spelling* Reading a variety of genres and writing for a variety of purposes gives children rich experiences in applying their phonics knowledge. Reading and spelling

experiences bind together what you teach about letters and sounds, and what children apply when they use phonics while reading and spelling. And, of course, the more children use phonics while reading and spelling, the more words they learn and the better their ability to read more challenging text and to spell more challenging words.

KEEPING PHONICS IN BALANCE IN YOUR CLASSROOM READING PROGRAM

When something is balanced, it is in proportion. Phonics is in balance with the other components in your classroom reading program when you select just the right approach, just the right materials, and just the right emphasis to develop the reading potential of every child. A balanced program includes many teaching methods, all in proportion to children's individual needs. What children know about reading connected text and the skills they bring to reading changes as their reading ability develops. It is no wonder then that the role of word identification in first grade is quite different from its proper place in a fourth-grade classroom. Yet the goal is the same: We want children to use word identification strategies we teach them to learn new words on their own and to use phonics to help them develop a large vocabulary of instantly recognized words.

In a balanced program, kindergarten, first-, and second-grade children learn to identify words by letter-sound patterns, which is the traditional grist of **letter-sound phonics** (Chapter 5). However, in this book we also include in a balanced reading program the teaching of analogy-based phonics (Chapter 4), which teaches children to identify new words by noticing shared letter groups, such as the *at* in *hat* and *fat*, and the teaching of large multiletter groups, or chunks, in the structure of words (Chapter 6), such as prefixes (the *re-* in *rerun*) and suffixes (the *-ed* in *jumped*). And, of course, balanced programs ensure that children have many and varied opportunities to use their knowledge of phonics, analogous letter groups, and multi-letter chunks in word structure when they read and spell.

The International Reading Association's (1997) position is that teachers should ask *when, how, how much, and under what circumstances* to teach phonics. We can see from this statement that phonics is not an all-or-nothing curriculum component. Rather, it is a portion of the curriculum that complements other reading and writing activities, and enables children to read and spell independently.

When Should You Teach Phonics?

The answer to *when* is the right time to teach phonics depends on children's development as readers. For children to develop a large vocabulary of instantly recognized words, classroom reading programs must dedicate a significant amount of time to phonics in the early grades. Because children in third grade and above already know how to use phonics, a balanced program for these children focuses on the multi-letter chunks in word structure (prefixes, suffixes, base words, contractions, syllables,

and root words, including Greek and Latin roots, as explained in Chapter 6). Thus, letter sounds should be taught in the first few grades (National Reading Panel, 2000), and the structure of long and complex words should be taught in grades three through five. This brings us to the next point—*how* to teach phonics.

How Will You Teach Phonics?

Although there is a plethora of phonics teaching materials available, teaching the letter sounds of phonics can be distilled into five teaching methods: (1) synthetic, (2) analytic, (3) embedded, (4) analogy based, and (5) spelling. If you teach reading or language arts in an elementary school, you will use one or more of these methods.

1. **Synthetic (explicit) phonics** is part-to-whole instruction. Synthetic phonics starts with teaching letter sounds (part). Children then use these associations to read and spell words (whole). For example, children first learn that the letter *s* represents /s/, *i* represents /i/, and *t* represents /t/. Children then blend these three sounds together to pronounce /sit/. On hearing themselves pronounce /sit/, children realize that *sit* represents the spoken word /sit/.
2. **Analytic (implicit) phonics** is whole-to-part instruction. Children learn whole words first. Then later children are taught, or encouraged to discover, which sounds go with which letters (part). For example, children learn to read words with a short /a/ letter sound, as we hear in *bat*. Then the teacher writes a known word, *bat*, on a chart, and asks children to pay special attention to the short /a/ sound. Next, the teacher asks children to suggest other short *a* words they already know to add to the list, such as *fan, mad, Sam, bad, ham, and map*. Everyone then studies the list and concludes that a single *a* in a short word stands for /a/.
3. **Embedded phonics** is taught “as needed”—that is, teachers teach only those letter-sound associations that children need to decode words in the books they are reading. Because children’s needs depend on the words in the books they are reading, embedded phonics does not teach letter-sound relationships in a prescribed order. Bear in mind that the National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that teaching phonics in a prescribed sequence is more effective than teaching phonics on an as-needed basis.
4. In **analogy-based phonics** with word families, children learn to use the parts of words they know to identify new words that share the same patterns. Analogy-based phonics groups words with the same patterns into word families (the *it* family, for example, consists of *sit, fit, and lit*), teaches children how to pronounce and spell families, and emphasizes wide-range reading and writing. You will learn more about this approach in Chapter 4.
5. In **spelling-based phonics** children study words that are spelled with letter-sound combinations that are consistent with their ability to understand these relationships. Phonics is taught through spelling, sorting, comparing words spelled with the same and different patterns of letter sounds, and comparing words children do not know with words they already know how to read and spell.

How Much Time Should You Spend Teaching Phonics?

How much time and energy you spend on phonics depends on children’s knowledge of the alphabetic principle and their ability to use phonics when reading and spelling. Unfortunately, there are no hard and fast rules for how much time to spend teaching phonics. Generally speaking, we spend proportionally more time teaching phonics in kindergarten through second grade when children do not know letter-sound relationships. In grades three through five, teachers teach children how to use word structure to read long words. (Chapter 6 has more information on teaching the structure of long words.)

The precise amount of the school day to spend on phonics varies, depending on the teaching materials and methods available to you in your classroom and on children’s development as readers. To strike the right balance in your classroom reading program, consider children’s needs and then select the intensity (how much) that is the best match for the individuals and groups you teach. Greg (Figure 1-3) knows only a few words, relies almost entirely on pictures to guess

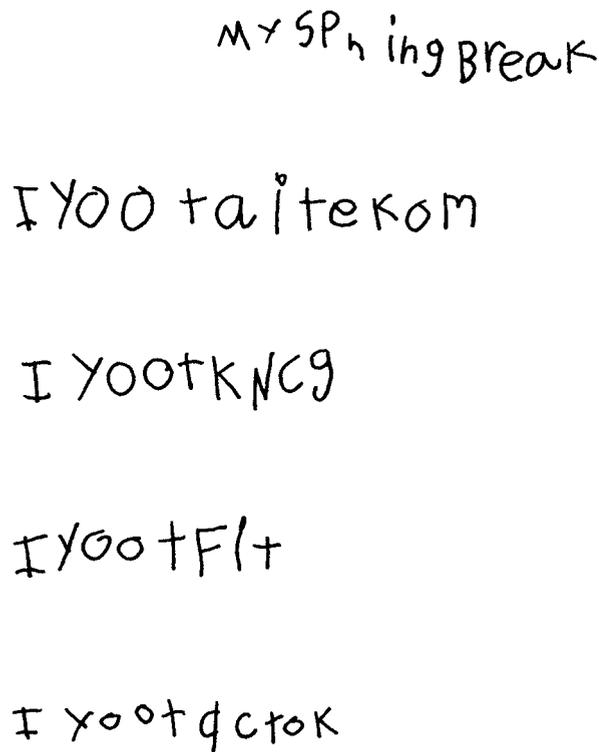


Figure 1-3 At the end of the first grade, Greg knows only a handful of words. He will benefit from explicit instruction in all aspects of reading, including phonics, and from opportunities to use letter and sound relationships when reading and spelling.

the meaning of text, inconsistently uses beginning and ending letter sounds to identify words, and forgets words from one day to the next. He does not always separate words with white spaces when he writes and does not consistently use letters to represent sounds.

Sharon, whose work can be seen in Figure 1-4, understands what she reads, uses phonics and context clues to read new words, and uses letter-sound relationships when spelling. Her reading vocabulary is growing rapidly, and she is developing reading independence. We can see from her writing that Sharon correctly spells many words, understands the sounds most consonants represent, and is learning how vowels represent sounds. (Look in Chapter 5 and Appendix A for explanations of consonants and vowels.) While both Greg and Sharon will benefit from more phonics knowledge, Greg has far more to learn than Sharon. For this reason, an appropriate classroom balance would include more phonics instruction for Greg than it would for Sharon. So, we see that the answer to how much phonics to teach in the early grades depends on children's understanding of letter-sound relationships and on their ability to use these relationships in everyday reading and writing.

The image shows a sample of handwritten text by Sharon. The text is written in a cursive, somewhat informal script. It reads: "My spring break was so fun! I beet my friend two times when we wr playing boling after that a cupool of day later we had a sleep ofer that was fun!". There are several misspellings: "beet" for "beat", "wr" for "were", "boling" for "boling", "cupool" for "cup", and "ofer" for "over".

Figure 1-4 While Sharon, Greg's first-grade classmate, will benefit from learning more about how letters represent sounds, she knows and uses many more letter-sound associations when she reads and writes than Greg. An appropriate classroom balance would include less concentration on phonics for Sharon than it would for Greg.

Under What Circumstances Should You Teach Phonics?

The answer to *under what circumstances* depends on how teachers differentiate instruction. Children may learn (a) all together in a large group, (b) in small groups, (c) in flexible skill groups, or (d) individually. Large groups typically include everyone, or nearly everyone, in the class, whereas small groups include a handful of children who are reading on or near the same level. Another kind of group, a flexible skills group, consists of children reading at vastly different levels who need to know more about specific letter-sound associations, specific reading strategies, or specific reading skills. These groups are disbanded once children know and apply the information and strategies when reading. Children also may be taught individually. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), all types of groups are effective, provided that instruction is systematic.

Many factors go into finding the right balance among phonics and other components of your classroom reading program—the grade you teach, children’s ability to use letter-sound relationships when reading and writing, and the size and growth of children’s reading vocabulary, to name a few. A classroom phonics program for a child like Greg, who brings less phonics knowledge to reading and writing, looks quite different from a program for a child like Sharon, who has more phonics knowledge. Even though the individual teachers in your school may not agree on the answers to when, how, how much, and under what circumstances to teach phonics in a balanced program, they all teach children how to read new words in text, which is the topic of the next section.

HOW CHILDREN READ WORDS

Children may read unknown words by analogy, letter-sound decoding, analyzing word structure, or predicting the word’s identity. Children read known words automatically or instantly from memory. The elementary reading program is designed so that all children are able to use analogy, letter-sound decoding, word structure, and predicting to read new words by the time they leave the elementary school. The goal is for all children to leave the elementary school with a large vocabulary of instantly recognized words learned through applying analogy, letter-sound decoding, word structure, predicting, spelling, and writing. By the time children move to middle school, they should instantly recognize nearly all the words they see in print, and they should be proficient at using analogy, letter-sound decoding, word structure, and predicting to read and learn new words.

Analogy

In using analogy, readers look for familiar letter groups in new words and then use this information to identify new words. For instance, on seeing a new word,

pig, readers realize that *ig* is also in a known word, *big*. Readers then use this information (*ig*) to read *pig*. When spelling, children realize that the /ig/ in /big/ also is in /pig/, a word they already know how to spell. Spellers then use this analogous information in combination with the beginning letter sound (/p/ = *p*) to spell *pig*.

Letter-Sound Decoding

Readers associate sounds with letters, say the sounds, and blend all the sounds together to pronounce a familiar spoken word. For example, on seeing *dark* for the first time, readers associate the /d/ with the letter *d*, the /ar/ with *ar*, and the /k/ with *k*. Having pronounced each sound individually, readers then blend these sounds together to pronounce the whole word (/d/ + /ar/ + /k/ = /dark/). On hearing /dark/, children recognize it as a word in their speaking vocabulary and, therefore, associate both meaning and sound with *dark*.

Analyzing the Structure of Long Words

Readers analyze the structure of long and complex words (structural analysis) into large multi-letter groups or chunks, including compound words, contractions, prefixes, suffixes, syllables, and Greek and Latin roots. You will learn about these multi-letter chunks in Chapter 6.

Prediction

Readers may use pictures, context cues, or a combination of context and beginning and/or ending letters to predict a word's identity.

1. *Picture cues* Readers use the information in pictures to guess or predict unfamiliar words.
2. *Context cues* When readers use context cues to predict the identity of an unfamiliar word, they rely on a combination of meaning (semantic) cues and sentence structure (syntactic) cues. **Meaning cues** are the sensible relationships among words in phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Readers use meaning cues to narrow down word choices and to verify that an identified word makes sense within the larger scope of the sentence or passage. When readers use meaning-based cues, they ask themselves, "Does this make sense?" **Sentence structure cues** are the basis on which readers decide whether an author's word order is consistent with English grammar. In using these cues they ask themselves, "Does this seem like language?"
3. *Context cues plus beginning and/or ending letters* Readers predict words that match the context and are spelled with the letters readers notice at the beginning and/or end of words. Brian's note, seen in Figure 1-5, illustrates how meaning, sentence structure, and beginning and/or ending letter cues work

I am
 playing
 in Mike's
~~sp~~preender

Figure 1-5 Brian's note: How do you figure out the meaning?

together. You, the reader, instantly recognize all the words as belonging to your reading vocabulary except one: *spreencler*. From sentence structure (syntactic) cues, you infer that *spreencler* is a noun, not a verb, adverb, or adjective. From meaning (semantic) cues, you surmise that this unknown object is something children enjoy during play. You can combine meaning, sentence structure, and letter-sound cues by asking yourself, "What word begins with *spr*, ends in *er*, and makes sense in the reading context?" Although Brian's spelling of *spreencler* is unconventional, the beginning and ending letter cues, as well as the meaning and sentence structure cues, are enough to figure out that Brian meant to say that he is playing in Mike's *sprinkler*.

Instant Recognition

Children instantly recognize known words. They recognize words in their reading vocabulary quickly, accurately, and effortlessly from memory. Known words are on the "tip of the tongue," always ready and immediately available any time children see them. Children instantly know the pronunciation and meaning of these words. This type of word reading does not require conscious attention or effort, which frees the reader's mind to focus on understanding text.

METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS

Metacognitive awareness is the self-conscious understanding of our own knowledge, skills, and strategies. From a word identification perspective, metacognitive awareness is a conscious understanding of how, when, and why to use different word identification strategies. It includes the self-awareness, or personal insight, into what an individual reader knows about letters and sounds, and why this knowledge is important. Metacognitively aware readers can explain to you, their teacher, the letter-sound relationships of phonics and the structure of long words. They can tell you why this information is important and explain how, when, and why to use different word identification strategies. Asking readers questions about letter-sound relationships and word structure, and asking them to explain why they select particular strategies helps readers to develop metacognitive awareness. When readers explain in their own words what they know about letter sounds and word structure and give reasons for using the strategies they do, they develop a self-awareness of their own knowledge and an appreciation of why and when to use different strategies. To help children become aware of what they know about letters and sounds, and how and when to use word identification strategies, ask questions such as these:

1. When would you use this same way to figure out another word?
2. What other kinds of words can be figured out just the way you figured out this one?
3. What do you do when you come to a word you do not know?
4. If the first try doesn't make a real word, what sound(s) could you try next? (This question helps children develop flexibility in decoding.)
5. What did you learn today that will help you be a better reader?

Encourage children to reflect on their knowledge of letter and sounds by pointing to a word and asking the following:

1. How did you know that is ____? Is there another way to tell?
2. How did you know that ____ (pointing to a letter sound or letter-sound group) makes the ____ sound in ____ (the word the child read correctly)?
3. When you see a ____ (describing a particular letter-sound group), what sound should you try first?
4. How would you write ____ (a word with a letter-sound association children are learning in your classroom)? Then follow up with the question: Why did you write it this way?

As children answer questions like these, they organize observations, form generalizations, change or alter information and ideas, and perhaps most important, become more confident in their own knowledge, better decoders, and more sensitive to how using word identification strategies supports the reading of text.

KEEPING WORD IDENTIFICATION MEANING-FOCUSED THROUGH TEACHING CHILDREN TO SELF-MONITOR, SELF-CORRECT, AND CROSS-CHECK

Good readers monitor their own comprehension, decide when to self-correct a misidentified word, and, should readers correct a misidentified word, cross-check to ensure that the word they corrected makes sense in the reading context. Self-monitoring, self-correcting, and cross-checking, when used together, are powerful tools for ensuring that the words children read are consistent with the reading context. Readers use self-monitoring to decide when comprehension is adequate, when comprehension has broken down, and when it is necessary to fix a word identification miscue. If readers determine that an identified word does not fit the context, they self-correct their own miscue. Readers then cross-check to see if the word they self-corrected makes sense.

Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring is self-regulating one's own reading. Readers use self-monitoring to determine when the text makes sense and when it does not. Readers who self-monitor are aware of their own comprehension. So long as readers understand text, they direct their attention to meaning. When, through self-monitoring, readers realize that the text no longer makes sense, they may (1) try different comprehension strategies, (2) reread or look back in the text to pick up the strand of meaning, or (3) pause to correctly identify a troublesome word. Good readers are so accomplished at self-monitoring that they do this automatically. Beginning readers or struggling readers need to learn to monitor their own reading. Self-monitoring will come easily to some children, others will need extra help from you to consistently monitor their own reading. Use the following prompts to encourage children to self-monitor.

1. Take another look at _____.
2. You read _____. Are you right?
3. You made a mistake in this sentence (paragraph or page). Can you find it?
4. What's wrong with _____?
5. Could it be _____ (pointing to a misidentified word)?

Self-Correcting

Self-correcting is the process of fixing a miscue. When readers detect a miscue through self-monitoring, they correct a misidentified word. Sometimes correcting a misidentified word takes several attempts, especially for inexperienced readers. If readers' first attempt to correct a misidentified word (or miscue) is unsuccessful, they try again. All good readers self-correct. They do this because they realize that the goal of reading is to understand text, and they realize that misidentified

words can affect meaning. Use the following prompts to support readers as they self-correct.

1. What's the tricky part in this word?
2. What is another word that begins with _____ (ends with _____ or has _____ in the middle) and makes sense?
3. You were almost right. See if you can figure out what you need to fix.
4. Call attention to vowel letters by saying, Take another look at _____ (point the vowel pattern). What sound does the vowel make in this pattern?

Encourage children to look at the letters, think of the context, and reread to confirm meaning. Reinforce self-correcting, saying, "I like the way you went back to fix that word," or "You did a good job going back to figure out a word that makes sense."

Cross-Checking

Cross-Checking gives readers valuable feedback on their own decoding. In cross-checking, readers ask themselves whether a word they identify makes sense in the reading context. Thus, one consequence of cross-checking is a metacognitive or conscious awareness of successful word identification. Readers know when an identified word is consistent with the context and when an identified word does not make sense. If, through cross-checking, readers realize that the identified word does not make sense, they try again to correct their miscue. If readers realize that the identified word makes sense, they return to textual reading. Use the following prompts to help children develop and use cross-checking.

1. Reread it and think about what would make sense.
2. You read _____. Does _____ look right and sound right?
3. Does what you just read sound like a real word?
4. You read _____. Can we say it that way?
5. Does _____ make sense?

Cross-checking may involve rereading a phrase or sentence to accept or reject the identified word. Once satisfied that the newly identified word makes sense in the reading context, children immediately refocus their attention on reading connected text.

STAGES OF LEARNING TO READ NEW WORDS

Word identification strategies and information change over time as children become more accomplished readers. Learning to read new words can be divided into stages or phases. When we know which stage children are in we have the information we need to provide instruction that meets each individual reader's needs. Children move through four word-learning stages—prealphabetic, partial alphabetic, alphabetic, and consolidated—on their way to the fifth stage, the automatic stage, where they instantly recognize all the words in text (Ehri, 2005).

As children enter each new stage, they use new information and new word identification strategies. Strategies develop in a reasonably predictable sequence that begins long before children read storybooks or go to school. Though the exact order in which strategies develop is not completely understood, we do know that readers use some strategies before others. The earliest strategies are used when children are in the prealphabetic stage.

Prealphabetic Word Learners in Preschool and Early Kindergarten

The prealphabetic stage begins in preschool and usually ends some time during kindergarten (Ehri, 2005; Ehri & McCormick, 1998). Children in this stage are usually three to five years old. Prealphabetic word learners do not understand the principle of alphabetic writing. Children know few, if any, letter names. They cannot separate or segment words into sounds (see Chapter 2 for an explanation of segmenting words into sounds). During the prealphabetic stage, children learn that words are separated by white spaces, one written word matches one spoken word, and print goes from left-to-right and top-to-bottom on pages. As we would expect, the word recognition strategies these children use do not call for paying attention to the letters and sounds in words. Children associate meaning with pictures in familiar books, recognize words by their familiar everyday surroundings, such as the word *stop* on a stop sign or recognize words because of their unique shapes, as explained in Chapter 3. Children at this stage pretend to read by turning pages and reading the pictures or reciting text from memory. When writing, children scribble or draw wavy lines to represent cursive writing. Eventually children replace scribbling with letterlike forms (mock letters) and pictures. As children become more sensitive to letters, they randomly mix real letters, mock letters, and numbers. Even though children use some real letters, we cannot read what they write because their letters do not represent sounds.

Partial Alphabetic Word Learners in Kindergarten and Early First Grade

Children enter the partial alphabetic stage sometime in kindergarten or at the beginning of first grade, as described in Chapter 3 (Ehri, 2005; Ehri & McCormick, 1998). Partial alphabetic word learners are usually five or six years of age. These children are beginning to understand the alphabetic principle. They use upper- and lowercase letters when writing, though they have a decided preference for uppercase letters. As children move through the partial alphabetic stage, they learn letter names and the sounds of most consonants. Children also learn short-vowel letter sounds, as heard in *bat*, *bet*, *bit*, *hot*, and *hut*, provided that the short-vowel sounds are part of the kindergarten classroom reading program. Children read a few words from memory, and recognize new words by associating one or two letter sounds with them. Partial alphabetic word learners use letter names to read words,

provided that the letter names contain a portion of the letter sounds. For example, children might use the name of the letter *s* to read *stop* because the letter name—/ess/—contains part of the letter sound, /s/. In spelling, children use one or more letters, usually consonants, to write whole words (*k* for *cat*; *dg* for *dog*). During the partial alphabetic stage, children become aware of rhyming words and the beginning and ending sounds in spoken words. Consequently, children use their knowledge of consonant letter sounds to read words by associating sounds with beginning and ending letters. Children’s reading vocabulary is growing, but only slowly and with a great deal of repetition in reading and writing.

Alphabetic Word Learners in Late Kindergarten Through Second Grade

Children usually enter the alphabetic stage in late kindergarten or early first grade. Most stay in the alphabetic stage through second grade, though some may linger in this stage a bit longer. The alphabetic stage begins when children identify words by associating a sound with each letter. Most notably, alphabetic word learners pay attention to vowel letters when reading and spelling. Children sound out new words (discussed in Chapter 5) or read new words by analogy (discussed in Chapter 4). When children spell, they include a letter for every sound heard, although not always in a conventional way (*truk* for *truck*). They learn to separate spoken words into sounds and blend sounds into spoken words (Chapter 2). Children’s reading vocabulary grows rapidly, and they learn words on their own through reading and writing. By the end of this stage, children have all the phonics tools they need to sound out and read many unfamiliar words on their own.

Early in this stage decoding and textual reading is somewhat labored. Children spend so much of their attention on figuring out the identity of new words that they plod through text. Reading is slow and, because readers may often stop to decode words, reading tends to be somewhat disfluent. This situation is only temporary, however. Associating sounds with letters helps children remember the words they read and spell. The more skilled alphabetic word learners become at using phonics to read and spell words, the more words children add to their reading vocabulary. As a consequence, children’s reading vocabulary grows by leaps and bounds. During this stage, children learn all the basic reading skills they need to be independent readers. By the end of the alphabetic stage, readers have a large enough reading vocabulary and good enough word identification skills to focus their attention on comprehension, not word identification, and to use reading as a tool to learn from content area textbooks.

Consolidated Word Learners in Third Grade and Above

Toward the end of second grade, and most certainly by fourth grade, children enter the consolidated stage (Ehri, 2005; Ehri & McCormick, 1998). Consolidated word learners learn to associate sounds with multiletter groups in long and complex words. These children learn to identify prefixes and suffixes, syllables, and word parts borrowed from Greek and Latin, as described in Chapter 6. Children

understand how prefixes, suffixes, and words parts borrowed from Greek and Latin affect word meaning. They understand how various syllable patterns represent sound and become accomplished at reading unfamiliar long words by dividing them into pronounceable syllables. Recognizing the multiletter groups or chunks in long words is a streamlined approach to reading and spelling new words. And, not surprisingly, children's reading vocabulary continues to grow rapidly. At this point in their development as readers, children learn the majority of new words on their own through reading and writing. They read a wide variety of texts for different purposes. In reading content area texts they focus on comprehension to learn new information and develop new concepts.

Automatic Readers

Automatic readers are proficient, accomplished readers. These readers instantly recognize all, or nearly all, the words they see in text. Words are read rapidly, accurately, and effortlessly. Word identification, self-monitoring, self-correcting, and cross-checking are automatically carried out without conscious attention or effort. When readers meet complex words they do not know, they have many strategies for reading and learning them. Readers pay full attention to comprehension because they no longer need the energy for word identification. At this point in their development as readers, children recognize more words in print than they use in conversation. Now, at last, the size of the reading vocabulary surpasses the size of the speaking vocabulary. Because text consists of words in readers' sight vocabulary, reading is pleasurable, rapid, and fluent.

Movement toward the instant recognition of a large number of words is gradual. Children transition from one stage to another as they learn and use more complex information and strategies. When children first begin to use a new strategy, their ability to apply the strategy and their understanding of the print and speech relationships needed to use the strategy is immature. With instruction, and ample reading and writing experiences, children's knowledge gradually matures and their ability to use the new word identification strategy improves. When children are relatively comfortable using a certain strategy and have a good understanding of the print and speech relationships that support it, they gradually move into the next higher stage, which calls for applying a more efficient strategy that is based on a more elaborate understanding of print and speech relationships. As is to be expected with any complex learning process, sometimes children use strategies to read and spell words that are characteristic of more than one stage. Gradually, however, the strategies from earlier stages fade away so that, whenever possible, readers use their most streamlined strategy to read and spell words.

Further Thoughts

When you, the teacher, are familiar with the stages and understand the knowledge and abilities that underpin the use of strategies in the different stages, you will make decisions that will help children move from one stage to the next. When you

understand the stages of word learning and the strategies that children in various stages use to read and spell new words, you have the information you need to relate what you teach to what children need to know to move to the next word learning stage. You will select just the right material to match the skills and abilities of children, and challenge children to develop new and more effective strategies. You will be a more effective teacher because you are teaching exactly what children need to know to become better at reading and spelling the new words that may stand in the way of understanding text.

Our goals are to develop readers who have such large fluent reading vocabularies that they seldom see words they do not already know how to read and to produce writers who correctly spell nearly all of the words in their fluent reading vocabularies. When all is said and done, word identification is not *the* goal of reading instruction. Rather, it is a means to an end, a way to help children learn new words on their own so as to support fluent reading, and, in the process, become confident readers who focus their attention on understanding text, on learning from text, and on enjoying reading as a leisure activity for a lifetime.

Translation of Figure 1-1, Maria's Valentine

Dear Mrs. Saracho,

You are a great teacher. I am learning new things every day. I hope that you will be able to teach here next year. You are the nicest teacher in fifth grade.

Love,

Maria

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