

Florida Center for Reading Research

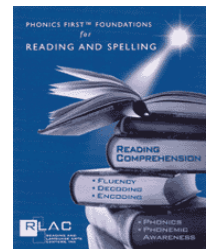
Phonics First Foundations

What is Phonics First Foundations?

Phonics First Foundations is a phonics program designed to supplement the core reading program for beginning and at-risk readers and to provide intensive phonics instruction for older students who are reading below grade level. The goal of the program is to teach accurate decoding and encoding skills based on a multisensory approach to teaching reading and spelling. The author recommends that teachers experienced with multisensory instruction or trained through the Phonics First Professional Development Course teach the daily lessons of 45-60 minutes with the whole class or small group.

The scope and sequence of *Phonics First Foundations* is clearly delineated in the curriculum guide. The program, consisting of four sequential levels, begins with the sound/symbol correspondences for short vowels and single consonants and progresses to digraphs, blends, affixes, long vowels, diphthongs, r-controlled vowels, and syllabication rules. Within each level, there are multiple activities to provide visual, auditory, and tactile practice in alphabetic skills. A typical lesson is divided into five parts with parts 1, 2, 4, and 5 taught from the beginning lessons and part 3 added in the second level. Part 1 is a review of previously taught concepts to build fluency. In part 2, the teacher has the option of choosing the same key word as the core reading program or a word from the Multisensory Guide to represent the new letter-sound correspondence. The teacher employs multi-modality methods to increase exposure to that letter-sound. For instance, students write the letter/s in the sand, manipulate sound cards, and tap phonemes on their fingers before they write then read the words dictated by the teacher. As the program progresses, part 3 is included to teach eight syllable types and three syllable division patterns (VCCV, VCV, and VV). Part 4 involves teaching students to orally spell and write non-phonetic sight words (referred to as Red Words) using arm tapping, tracing, and writing the letters of the words on a textured surface. The teacher discusses the meaning of the sight word before the students are asked to use the word in a sentence and spell it. Part 5, on oral reading, requires the teacher to seek phonetically controlled reading material for the students to practice reading beyond level one.

The components of *Phonics First Foundations* consist of the Phonics First Foundations for Reading and Spelling Curriculum Guide, Student Practice Books A and B, Syllabication Practice Book, Multisensory Activity Book, Reproducible Mini-Books, Phonics Drill Pack, sand tray with sand, and textured plastic for tracing letters. All materials are purchased individually or in a variety of kits. The Phonics First Foundations for Reading and Spelling Curriculum Guide contains the instructional materials to teach all lessons. The details for each part of the lesson are described in the introduction and a list of the review elements, new skills, sight words, and sentences are contained in each lesson. When a new skill is introduced, there is additional information in the lesson for the teacher to better understand the new concept. The Curriculum Guide also contains pre and post tests of sight words to determine which 'Red Words' need to be taught and when they are mastered. Mastery is achieved when students can write and read the words.



How is Phonics First Foundations aligned with Current Research?

Phonics First Foundations addresses phonics, one of the important components of reading instruction cited by the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000). The program's instructional content follows a continuum that develops progressively from each sound/symbol correspondence to more complex skills that involve affixes, digraphs, diphthongs, and syllabication patterns. The systematic instruction and review of previously taught skills are aligned with current reading research. Explicit teaching, scaffolding, and practice opportunities to support the student during instruction are less evident throughout the program; instead, the emphasis for all lesson components is on multisensory instruction. For instance, a typical multisensory activity to practice /m/ involves eating, placing, and gluing M & M candies on a template of that letter; other practice opportunities that involve singing songs with the sound in one of the words, baking cookies in the shape of the letter, and tracing the letter in sand lack the specificity and relationship to reading that are consistent with current research on explicit instruction.

The program's focus on the alphabetic principle attempts to help students master the connection between sounds and print. Immediately following the introduction of a new sound, students are expected to finger tap each sound in the word then write the word dictated by the teacher. *After* writing the dictated words, students immediately read the words from their paper or the Student Practice Book. This is a unique aspect to *Phonics First Foundations* in that most programs choose to teach the easier skill of decoding first.

The instructional design offers consistent teaching routines for each lesson. However, because they are only described in the introduction to the program, these routines would need to be memorized in order for the teacher to apply them to teaching the list of sounds and words in the daily lesson. The directions within the lesson are minimal. Teacher prompts to offer more guided practice when students are not displaying mastery or information on how to document student mastery of a skill are not provided.

Professional development for *Phonics First Foundations* is available through the training course using *Phonics First: A Multisensory Phonics Training Manual for Teachers*. Training with this manual is available onsite or at a nationally based training session. Depending on the needs of the school, the sessions can be customized to provide 3-5 days of training. This training is considered a critical component to effectively implementing the program's materials. In addition to learning the *Phonics First Foundations* program, teachers learn essential components to teaching reading to all students.

Research Support for Phonics First Foundations

Phonics First Foundations was first published in 1991 with the most recent revision in 2005. Although the program provides a systematic instructional format, many features of the instructional design are not consistent with current findings on reading instruction. At this time no empirical research has been conducted on its effectiveness as a phonics program. Future studies that employ control groups and have sound experimental designs are necessary to determine the efficacy of this program.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Phonics First Foundations*:

- A detailed scope and sequence is provided.
- A sound pronunciation guide is available at www.rlac.com/sounds and a phoneme/grapheme chart is in the Curriculum Guide.
- Syllable reference cards and worksheet pages in the Phonics First Foundations for Syllabication Book provide a step-by-step process for practicing the process of syllabication.

Weaknesses of *Phonics First Foundations*:

- The program lacks specific instructions to guide teachers in giving immediate, specific feedback.
- The teacher does not model how to segment a word into sounds before the students are asked to segment and write a new word.
- At the higher reading levels, teachers are expected to provide the text material for students to apply their newly learned skills.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement Phonics First Foundations?

Orange 407-317-3202

Jackson 850-482-1200

For More Information

<http://rlac.com/store/page150.html>

References



National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. NIH Publication No. 00-4754. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

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Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

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