

# Florida Center for Reading Research

## Smart Way Reading and Spelling

### What is Smart Way Reading and Spelling?

Bright Sky Learning's *Smart Way Reading and Spelling* is a supplemental program for students in grades first through fifth. The goal of the program is to provide additional practice for those students that have already acquired basic letter name and letter sound knowledge. *Smart Way Reading and Spelling* can be taught by teachers, paraprofessionals, parents, volunteers, or peer tutors and lends itself to use in a variety of settings including Extended Day Program, Resource Room, Media Center, and the regular classroom. One-to-one instruction takes place for a minimum of three, 20-minute sessions per week. Throughout the program, students receive spelling instruction and are introduced to high frequency words from the Dolch Word List.

The program contains three sections yielding 27 lessons. By the end of lesson six, students are expected to be able to read and write any three-letter word using short vowel sounds. By the end of lesson 11, students have been taught all beginning and ending blends, consonant digraphs, and the word endings -ing and -ed. By the end of lesson 17, students have been introduced to all sounds made by each letter of the alphabet. By the end of lesson 21, students have been taught the sounds made by all of the vowel teams as well as special vowel sounds and the majority of the graphemes in the English language. By the end of the program, students are expected to be able to decode and spell all words taught in lessons 1-27.

A typical 20-minute lesson begins with the tutor asking the student to say the names and sounds of letters or combinations of letters. A target word is provided as a mnemonic device to help the student remember the sound. For example, the tutor reads from the flipchart, "The short sound of the letter i is the beginning sound of the word igloo," but does not pronounce the sound of the letter for the student unless the student mispronounces it. A brief explanation is given to the student regarding how the letter will appear in the dictionary pronunciation key, "Some dictionaries use a mark above the vowel i to show that it has a short sound." Next, the student is prompted to trace the short vowel sound mark with his or her finger. Then, the student is asked to read a series of words containing the short i vowel sound while pointing to the vowel in each word. A word from the series is selected for the student to find in the Smart Way Student Dictionary. In addition, the student is asked to read and then copy words and sentences into the Student Skillbook. Finally, the student is asked to answer questions regarding meanings of sentences read.

Tutor materials consist of 27 lesson flip charts with directions and a booklet entitled *How to Be A Reading Coach*, which contains a sound pronunciation key, English Letter Combinations, and tips on teaching. A Coaching Reference Booklet with technical assistance such as setting up a lesson flip chart, delivering a lesson, and correcting student errors is also provided. Other Tutor materials include an Activities Index, a Progress Board for tutors to keep track of student progress, and Worksheet Booklets. Student materials consist of a Student Skillbook (contains lined paper for the writing portion of each lesson, skills reviews, lesson logs, and certificates of achievement), Smart Way Dictionary (contains all words and definitions for the first 11 lessons of the program), and the Webster's New World Student Dictionary.



*Smart Way Reading and Spelling* provides two types of assessment (ABC Skills and Decoding Skills). The ABC Skills Assessment is administered three times within the year (beginning, middle, and end of instruction) and used to determine the student's letter name and letter sound knowledge. The Decoding Skills Assessment is administered at the beginning of the program and used to place students, third grade and above, into the appropriate section of the program as well as monitor student improvement within the program. Additionally, tutors are provided with support in the form of a Progress Tracking Board that allows the instructor to monitor the student's progression through the program.

### How is the *Smart Way Reading and Spelling* aligned with Reading First?

Reading First identifies five instructional components essential for reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The overall purpose of *Smart Way Reading and Spelling* is phonics instruction. Therefore, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension are not explicitly taught within the program.

The National Reading Panel (2000) has established that phonics instruction increases accuracy in decoding and word recognition, which facilitates comprehension. *Smart Way Reading and Spelling* provides explicit and systematic instruction in phonics. The program specifically teaches letter-sound correspondences and requires students to master individual letter sounds before larger orthographic units are taught. In later sections of the program, word parts are initially taught and then incorporated into words, sentences, and connected text. *Smart Way Reading and Spelling* follows a sequence of phonics skills development that promotes fluent and automatic application of phonics skills to text. Beginning in lesson 2 and continuing through lesson 27, students master a few letter sounds then immediately apply this knowledge to reading word lists and short decodable text. The program includes high frequency words from the Dolch Word List and explicit spelling instruction in every lesson. For example, the decoding (symbol to sound)/spelling (sound to symbol) connection is taught by requiring students to read a word, write the same word, and read the word again in a list or short text. *Smart Way Reading and Spelling* requires phonetic readers, which allow students to practice newly acquired phonics skills. At this time, a short list of decodable and reproducible readers is available at the Smart Way member website. However, it is important to note that common spelling patterns are not emphasized in the program. For instance, the program teaches patterns such as du, io, eo, ti, si, tu, ua, ia, iu within words but includes only a few common word families such as ill, ink, ack, op, ash, or all.

Professional Development is provided with every purchase of *Smart Way Reading and Spelling* curriculum and can be customized to meet the needs of the participants. Coaching and follow-up assistance is available in three forms (e-mail, telephone, internet). Also, the *Smart Way Reading and Spelling* Member Website offers activities for tutors to use with students, teaching tips and ideas for the program, an online message board for tutors to exchange information, and a news section that contains program updates from the publishing company. Online program management software is available for customers purchasing five or more kits. The software allows the literacy provider (e.g., school, extended day program, tutoring center, literacy volunteer center, etc.) to track information about students, volunteers, tutors, program goals, assessment scores, and student progress during each lesson. This

software also allows for keeping records such as anecdotal records indicating special needs or difficulties of the student.

### Research Support for Smart Way Reading and Spelling

The first version of *Smart Way Reading and Spelling* was developed in 2001 with the second version following later that same year. The final version, described in this report, was developed in the fall of 2002. Due to the newness of *Smart Way Reading and Spelling*, there is no empirical evidence at this time to validate the efficacy of the program. However, the program is currently being used in several studies conducted by Graduate Students, Principals, and Classroom Teachers. Future research to support the efficacy of this program should take the form of well-designed studies with randomization.

### Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Smart Way Reading and Spelling*:

- Certified and non-certified individuals can teach the program.
- Teaching materials are easy to use.
- Phonics instruction is explicit and systematic.
- Scaffolding is used consistently throughout the program.
- Controlled vocabulary is used in the lessons.
- The Professional Development component provides adequate support.

Weaknesses of *Smart Way Reading and Spelling*:

- Letter sounds are not consistently modeled throughout the program; frequent and cumulative reviews of letter sounds and words are not provided.
- Common spelling patterns are not emphasized in the program.

### Which Florida districts have schools that implement Smart Way Reading and Spelling?

Hillsborough	813-272-4022
Washington	850-638-6222

### For More Information

<http://www.smartwayreading.com>

### References

National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications on reading instruction*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Washington, D.C.



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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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