Introduction to 
Phonics Blitz: Decoding 
Lessons for Adolescents

Presented at 
Summer Institute 
University of Cincinnati 
June 15, 2009

Presented by 
Linda Farrell 
Linda@AccentonReading.com 
571-213-1800

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Topics

• Overview & Video
• 3 general areas of reading that can cause poor comprehension.
• Emphasize accuracy
• Research supporting teaching decoding
• Identifying students who need decoding lessons
• Scope and Sequence
• Lesson Structure
• Why the Lessons Work
• 5 Essential Components of Reading
• Benefits and Expected Outcomes

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Phonics Blitz

• 40 Lessons to help students who struggle with decoding (reading words accurately).
• Focus is on accurate reading.
• Accurate reading leads to increased comprehension because students no longer guess words incorrectly.
• Lessons are for students in grades 4-12.
  – The vocabulary in the lessons is sophisticated.

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FOCUS

Four Major Components Necessary to Achieve Reading Comprehension

Decoding
- word recognition, phonological awareness, sight words

Vocabulary / Oral Language
- structural analysis, related words, etymology, syntax

Integration
- integrating prior knowledge with understanding of text

Comprehension

Focus after 2nd grade is here.

Many older students have decoding difficulties that are never assessed or addressed.

Accurate Decoding Is the Goal

Phonemic Awareness Is Explicitly Taught

- Students learn to segment phonemes in orally spoken words.
- Students learn to identify vowel sounds as “short,” “long,” “r-controlled,” or “other.”
- SPEECH TO PRINT
  - Students learn that vowels are both sounds and letters, and that the sound can be recognized and named without letters.
Students Correct Their Own Errors

• Error correction is immediate.
• Error correction is positive.
  – “You got the first and last sounds right. Touch and say the sounds in the word.”
  – “That is the name of the letter, what is the sound?”
  – “You read two words correct. Touch and say the middle word.”

Students Read Individually

• Every student reads decodable words orally and individually at least three times during each lesson.
  – Detective Work
  – Words to Read
  – Sentences

Students Read Non-Decodable Text and Chart Their Accuracy and Rate (WCPM)

• Each lesson starts with every student reading a passage aloud for one-minute.
• Student track their accuracy percentage and WCPM (words correct per minute).
• Accuracy is more important than speed.
  – Once students read consistently with 98% accuracy, they focus on improving their speed while maintaining accuracy.
Time Commitment for Completing Lessons

- Approximately 10 weeks, fifty minutes to one hour per day, five days a week is enough time to complete all 40 lessons.
- A lesson does not have to be completed in a class session.
- Lessons can be given in 45 or 30 minute sessions:
  - 45-minute sessions take approximately 17 weeks
  - 30-minute sessions take approximately 25 weeks.

Group Size: 12 or Fewer Students

- Groups no larger than 12 or 8 students (depending on whether decoding weakness is mild or moderate) insure:
  - Every student gets a chance to read with immediate positive error correction from teacher.
  - Lessons are completed within a reasonable time frame.
- Larger groups:
  - Reduce the opportunity for each student to read individually at least 3 times during every lesson.
  - Will take longer than 1 hour per lesson.

Academic Language Is Emphasized

- Students quickly learn to accurately read words they will find in their content area texts.
- Examples of words students read in Phonics Blitz:
  - stench, dredge, abscond, pedestal, manifest (by Lesson 11)
  - citadel, decompose, forensic, Madagascar (by Lesson 20)
  - atmosphere, conglomerate, laudatory, innuendo (by Lesson 40)

Student Characteristics

- Students who benefit from Phonics Blitz exhibit one or more of the following behaviors when reading:
  - skip words
  - leave off word endings
  - misread or guess unfamiliar words
  - misread function words (the, a, of, for)
  - have difficulty reading multi-syllable words
  - spell poorly
  - read slowly.
Student Profile

• Phonics Blitz benefits students who may appear to read "adequately, but not always good enough."
• Phonics Blitz is not for the lowest level readers.

PHONICS BOOST and PHONICS BLAST-OFF

• Some students have decoding weaknesses that require more instruction and practice than Phonics Blitz provides.
• Phonics Boost lessons are the same concepts taught in 80 1-hour lessons.
• Phonics Blast-Off lessons are for students who essentially need to start with beginning reading instruction because their decoding skills are so low.
  – In development; not yet published

GROUPING STUDENTS

GROUPING MATRIX

PHONICS BLITZ

One-minute Oral Reading
WCMP
Accuracy Percentage

Diagnostic Decoding Surveys
(reading words in isolation)

Beginning Decoding Survey
• Short vowels
• Digraphs
• Blends

Advanced Decoding Survey
• Advanced vowel patterns
• Multi-syllable words
Grouping Matrix

- Using the computer-based Grouping Matrix will insure that students are placed in the appropriate group for Phonics Blitz, Phonics Boost, or more basic lessons.
- Email scott@ReallyGreatReading.com to request:
  - a complementary copy of the Diagnostic Decoding Surveys (take approximately 5 minutes to administer to each student)
  - The Grouping Matrix spreadsheet for entering data

Student’s Reading Difficulties Vary

“. . . students [reading below grade level in grades 4-12] are very heterogeneous. Not only do they differ significantly from one another in their levels of difficulty, but they also differ from one another in the nature of their reading problems.”

*Academic Instruction for Adolescents*

published by the *Center on Instruction*

(page 67)

Focus on the Weak Skill that Hinders Reading Comprehension

“For students with severe word-level reading problems, interventions that directly improve reading accuracy can have a significant impact on comprehension.”

Joe Torgesen (2005)

Valeska & Chris
Decoding Inaccuracy Is a Well-Recognized Reason for Reading Difficulties among Adolescents

“Some students, for example those who fit the modern research-based definitions of dyslexia (Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 2003) or specific reading disabilities, have difficulties reading the words in text accurately and fluently but may have quite strong vocabulary and language comprehension skills.”

“Still other students struggle both with reading accuracy and fluency as well as with decoding.”

Academic Instruction for Adolescents
published by the Center on Instruction
(page 67)

Students Who Struggle with Decoding Need Intense Instruction

“Some [students] require or would benefit from intense, individualized instruction. This is particularly true of the student who struggles with decoding and fluency.”

Reading Next
published by the Carnegie Corporation of New York
(page 18)

The Phonics Blitz Method for Teaching Students to Read Multi-Syllable Words Is Effective

This study showed that teaching students to syllabicate by pronouncing a word orally, counting its syllables, matching each syllable to spelling, then blending syllables to read the whole word helped students read novel words more easily. Students were in grades 6-10 and had four 30-minute one-on-one sessions.


Explicitly Teaching Phonemic Awareness and Phonics to Struggling Adolescent Readers is Effective

This study showed that explicit phonemic awareness and phonics instruction at the word level with additional focus on reading connected text had “dramatic impacts on the reading skills.” Comprehension scores increased from the 13th percentile to the 29th percentile. Intervention in this study was one-on-one tutoring for approximately 65 hours. Students were in the 3rd, 4th and 5th grades.

Explicitly Teaching Decoding Skills to High School Students with Poor Reading Accuracy is Effective

This study showed that explicit decoding instruction for students who struggled with reading accuracy improved comprehension scores an average of 7.6 raw score points (11 to 19 increase in percentile rank), as opposed to a comparison group that improved only 2.3 points on the Woodcock Johnson Reading Mastery Test. This was a statistically significant increase. High school students attended one-hour tutoring sessions for 15 – 18 sessions.


References

PHONICS BLITZ
SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

1. One syllable words with short vowels
   - jab - scrunch - prompt
2. Multi-syllabic words with short vowels (including schwa)
   - magnificence - propaganda - detrimental
3. R-controlled vowels
   - quirk - orthodox - circumference
4. Open syllables (long vowels spelled with one letter at the end of a syllable)
   - python - agitator - intoxicating
5. Vowel-consonant-e (silent e)
   - theme - hemisphere - disenfranchise
6. Vowel teams
   - blight - demeanor - thoroughly
7. Two vowels together, with each vowel in a syllable
   - riot - linoleum - excruciating
By Lesson 11 . . .

• Students are confidently reading many content area words.

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Content Area Words with Short Vowels - MATH

- element
- expand
- extend
- product
- statistic
- hexagon
- segment
- octagon
- random
- problem
- subset
- subtract
- constant
- metric
- convexit
- input
- octagonal
- maximum
- solid
- profit
- mathematics
- construct

Note: Words also contain schwa
Content Area Words with Short Vowels – SOCIAL STUDIES

cabinet
radical
political
elastic
citizen
rebel
protestant
ethnic
civil
public
fossil
abolish
misconduct
investment
amendment
element
annex
dissent
scandal
conflict
dissent
 assassinn
capitalism
custom
politics

Note: Words also contain schwa.

Content Area Words with Short Vowels – GEOGRAPHY

capital
product
fossil
London
capitol
volcanic
subtropical
Istanbul
canyon
tropical
wetlands
Dallas
continent
continental
canal
Columbus
compass
inland
planet
Memphis
ethnic
grasslands
Wisconsin

Note: Words also contain schwa.

Content Area Words with Short Vowels – SCIENCE

abdomen
adapt
constant
contract
convex
expand
filament
fossil
funnel
fulcrum

habitat
infect
insect
magnet
mammal
piston
pollen
sediment
skeleton

sediment
skeloton
combust
distill

fungus
gamma
Kelvin
kinetic
ligament

Note: Words also contain schwa.

PHONICS BLITZ

LESSON STRUCTURE
Four Parts to Each Lesson
Lessons are approximately 1 hour.

1. One-minute timed oral reading
   (5-10 minutes)
2. Phonemic awareness (Lessons 1-20)
   or
   Comprehension (Lessons 21-40)
   (7-12 minutes)
3. Explicit instruction about a phonics concept
   (20-25 minutes)
4. Individual student practice — Accurately reading
   lists and sentences with words containing the phonics
   concept taught.
   (20-25 minutes)

Major Decoding Goal

• Students understand that a
  98% or higher accuracy rate
  is the goal with all reading.

Description of 1-Minute Timed Oral Reading

1. Teacher and students review vocabulary words.
2. One student reads a passage for one minute.
3. Other students mark any errors.
4. Students pair up and read the passage in pairs,
   with one student reading while the other marks.
5. Students chart their progress.
Purpose of 1-Minute Timed Oral Reading

Lessons 1-20
Students practice reading with attention to accuracy.

Lessons 21-40
Students learn to read for information and to support answers to questions by finding the information in the passage.

Oral Reading in the Classroom

Ms. Kate Ides, teacher at New Orleans Math and Science High School, administers Oral Reading Fluency Practice with her 9th and 10th grade students.

Students Chart Accuracy and Fluency

See page 8 in Handout
Part 2
PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Teach students to recognize vowel sounds.

Teach students to recognize vowel SOUNDS.

• For older readers, most decoding confusion centers around vowels.
• This part of the lessons uses multi-sensory instruction to teach students to identify vowel sounds in spoken words.
• When students can hear vowel sounds and identify them as long or short, they are easily able to match the vowel sounds with spelling patterns.

No Written Words in This Part of Lessons

• Students learn to hear phonemes without referring to spelling.
• Students learn the “language” of phonics instruction.
  – That a vowel is a sound.
  – That vowel sounds can be classified as:
    • Short
    • Long
    • R-controlled
    • Other

Part 3
PHONICS CONCEPTS
Students Use Multi-Sensory Techniques To Understand Phonics Concepts

- Teacher uses manipulatives to illustrate letter-sound relationships.
- Students practice concepts using manipulatives.
- Manipulatives used are:
  - Letter tiles
  - Colored tiles
  - SyllaBoards

Lesson 11 - Reading Words with 3-5 Syllables

Word is “catastrophic” – Letter tile is “qu”

Part 4
READING WORDS AND SENTENCES

See pages 17, 19, 21, and 22 in handout.

Each Student Reads Aloud
Student reads until he or she has read 100% accurately

- Reading decodable words and sentences allows students to build confidence that they can read accurately.
- The teacher can check whether students are understanding the concepts during this part of the lesson.
Description of Sentences
(Examples from Lesson 11)

The sentences in all lessons are organized into 3 categories:

- **Challenging** (easiest and shortest)
  
  *Example:* Was Edison first to invent the light bulb? (8)

- **More Challenging** (harder and longer)
  
  *Example:* The lab assistant was optimistic he would find all the electronic elements requested. (13)

- **Most Challenging** (hardest and longest)
  
  *Example:* We drifted out from Manhattan, into the Atlantic, and past the continental shelf in our intrepid craft. (17)

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**Sentences Are Designed to Help Students Break Their Guessing Habits**

- The sentences are purposefully not predictable.
  - Students must pay attention to every word.
  - Guessing will not work with these sentences

- **Examples:**
  - Lesson 5 (tch & dge) – The judge will sob when he cannot rig a patch in the thatch with his sock. (17)
  - Lesson 16 (hard & soft c) – Do not mince words when the independence of the citizens in the citadel hangs in the balance. (18)

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**WHY THE LESSONS WORK**

**PHONICS BLITZ**
Chris Sums Up What He Learned

Students Who Will Benefit from Phonics Blitz Are Systematically Identified

• Oral Reading Assessments
  – One minute oral reading of grade level – Words Correct per Minute (WCPM) and accuracy percentage
    • Reading a grade level passage
  – Really Great Reading Decoding Survey Scores
    • Reading words in isolation
• Really Great Reading’s Grouping Matrix will show which students will benefit from Phonics Blitz.

Student’s Improve Reading Skills Because . . .

• Manipulatives and multi-sensory instruction reinforce the phonics concepts taught.
• Students are successful because they learn how to read words – they no longer have to guess.
• Students are grouped correctly, based on assessment of specific decoding weaknesses.

Lesson Design

• Lessons are systematic, explicit, and multi-sensory.
• Error correction is positive and immediate.
• Lessons have all the information teachers need.
  – What You Need to Know gives background information.
  – Lesson instructions are detailed, but not scripted.
    • Every step is explained.
    • Teachers know what to teach, and they can use their own words to deliver the lessons.
Lessons Are Structured So Students Succeed

- Students are asked only to read words they have the skills to read.
- Students are taught how to notice errors and correct errors themselves.
- Students feel good when they read difficult words accurately and independently.

All Five Essential Components of Reading Instruction Are Addressed

- The National Reading Panel identified Five Essential Components of Reading Instruction:
  - Phonemic Awareness is explicitly taught in lessons 1-20.
  - Phonics is explicitly taught in all lessons.
  - Fluency improves when students read more accurately and as they practice reading daily. Students chart their fluency.
  - Vocabulary improves as students are exposed to new words in word lists and sentences. Vocabulary words from oral reading passages are explicitly presented.
  - Comprehension improves as students decode words faster and more accurately. Students read passages in lessons 21-40 and answer questions, supporting them with information from the passage.
Some Students Will Pop Up to Grade Level

- Students who reach grade level or above on comprehension and oral reading assessments had all aspects of reading in place except decoding.
- Improving decoding accuracy filled the hole that was keeping them from achieving grade level scores on reading assessments.

Some Students Will Need More Help

- After finishing Phonics Blitz lessons, some students will need further instruction:
  - Fluency practice to build reading rate while maintaining accuracy
  - Vocabulary instruction so more words are easily identified
  - Repeat some Phonics Blitz lessons that were not mastered.

Expected Outcomes

- Reading accuracy will improve.
- Comprehension will improve because students read the words accurately.
- Students will be exposed to many academic words, making content area reading easier.

If You Have a Program You Like . . .

- Consider including the following:
  - Phonemic awareness instruction focusing on identifying the vowel sounds.
  - Having students regularly tracking their accuracy and rate when reading for one minute.
  - Positive error correction, telling the student what he did right before guiding him to the answer.