

Top Ten Reasons to Teach Phonics

January 17th, 2009 | [Mark Pennington, MA Reading Specialist](#)

1. Phonics is an efficient way to teach reading.

There are only 43 common speech sounds (phonemes) in English and these are represented by about 89 common spellings. Learning the phonics code produces the biggest learning bang for the smallest instructional buck.

2. Phonics works.

The swing away from “whole language” to phonics-based instruction over the last 15 years has vastly improved reading test scores on nationally normed tests.

3. Phonics is the fastest way to learn how to read.

Reading is not a developmentally acquired skill that naturally derives over time from lots of reading (Adams, 1988; Stanovich, 1986; Foorman, Francis, Novy, & Liberman 1991). Learning the code is the quickest way to learn how to read accurately and independently. Non-readers can independently read simple decodable text after minimal instruction.

4. Phonics makes students better spellers.

Because explicit phonics instruction teaches recognition, pronunciation, and blending of the [sound-spelling patterns](#), students are better equipped to apply those same patterns to [spellings](#).

5. Phonics requires less rote memorization.

The “Dick and Jane” reading method requires [memorization of hundreds of words](#). Phonics makes use of prior knowledge (the sound-spelling relationships) to apply to new learning.

6. Phonics works better for students with learning disabilities.

Students with auditory and visual processing challenges learn best from the structure of explicit [phonemic awareness](#) and phonics instruction.

7. Phonics works better for English-language learners.

Phonics instruction relies on phonemic awareness and the connection of speech sounds to spellings. Phonics builds upon and adjusts that connection, rather than abandoning reading instruction already gained in the primary language.

8. Phonics works better for remedial readers.

Effective diagnostic assessments can easily determine which phonics skills have been mastered and which have not. Gap-filling simply makes sense. [Remedial readers](#) have strengths to build upon—they don’t need to start from scratch.

9. Phonics makes students smarter.

New research shows that phonics-based instruction can actually change brain activity, resulting in significant improvements in reading (Flowers, 2004). Shankweiler, Lundquist, Dreyer, and Dickinson (1996) noted that differences in [comprehension](#) for upper elementary students largely reflected levels of decoding skill.

10. Phonics learning builds self-esteem.

Because progress is so measurable, students can quickly see their improvement in assessment data, and more importantly, in reading.