Common Core Standards and Best Practices

Introduction: The Common Core
The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) represent a coherent progression of learning expectations in English language arts and mathematics. They are designed to prepare K-12 students for college and career success.

The English Language Arts (ELA) K-5 standards focus on six strands:
- Three Reading strands – Literature, Informational Text, Foundational Skills
- Writing
- Speaking and Listening, and
- Language.

Because the Reading (Literature and Informational Text strands) standards place equal emphasis on the sophistication of what students read and the skill with which they read, they speak to the importance of all students having ownership of the Reading: Foundational Skills strand.

Phonics and Word Recognition are foundational reading skills. Students must be able to decode (read) and encode (write, spell) words. The standards focus on the systematic correspondences between letters—individually or in combination—and sounds. Written English is built on these systematic correspondences; only 4% of words in English are true oddities, following no rules.

Phonics lessons flow more smoothly when teachers:
- have a routine for the roll out of their lesson
- use key words to help students recall letter sounds quickly, and
- consistently use familiar cues to maximize instructional time and student learning.

The purpose of this explicit, systematic approach to phonics instruction is not simply that students are able to sound out words. The purpose is for students to be able to recognize words, quickly and automatically, allowing the student to turn his/her attention to comprehension of the text.
CCSS-ELA Reading: Foundational Skills – Phonics & Word Recognition

Kindergarten

Phonics & Word Recognition

3. Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.
   a. Demonstrate basic knowledge of one-to-one letter-sound correspondences by producing the primary or many of the most frequent sound for each consonant.
   b. Associate the long and short sounds with common spellings (graphemes) for the five major vowels.
   c. Read common high-frequency words by sight (e.g., the, of, to, you, she, my, is, are, do, does).
   d. Distinguish between similarly spelled words by identifying the sounds of the letters that differ.

Grade 1

Phonics & Word Recognition

3. Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.
   a. Know the spelling-sound correspondences for common consonant digraphs.
   b. Decode regularly spelled one-syllable words.
   c. Know final -e and common vowel team conventions for representing long vowel sounds.
   d. Use knowledge that every syllable must have a vowel sound to determine the number of syllables in a printed word.
   e. Decode two-syllable words following basic patterns by breaking the words into syllables.
   f. Read words with inflectional endings.
   g. Recognize and read grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words.
Phonics Instruction

American Standard English is comprised of 44 speech sounds (25 consonants and 19 vowel sounds), called phonemes.

The 44 Sounds of English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonants</th>
<th>Vowels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/b/ bat</td>
<td>/ã/ apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/d/ dot</td>
<td>/è/ edge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/f/ fit</td>
<td>/i/ itch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/g/ gate</td>
<td>/õ/ octopus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/h/ hit</td>
<td>/ù/ up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/j/ jump</td>
<td>/ã/ ape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/k/ kite</td>
<td>/è/ eraser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/l/ leaf</td>
<td>/i/ ice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/m/ map</td>
<td>/õ/ over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/n/ next</td>
<td>/yo/ cube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/p/ pig</td>
<td>/a/ alarm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/r/ rock</td>
<td>/oo/ moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/s/ sun</td>
<td>/oo/ book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/t/ tap</td>
<td>/ou/ mouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/v/ vase</td>
<td>/oi/ boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/w/ wagon</td>
<td>/o/ ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/y/ yellow</td>
<td>/u/ bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/z/ zero</td>
<td>/a/ chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ch/ cheese</td>
<td>/a/ car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/sh/ ship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/th/ (voiced(^1)) this</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/th/ (unvoiced) thank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/hw/ wheel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/zh/ treasure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ng/ sing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phonology is governed by rules that are systematic and predictable. The rules of English create a rhythm and redundancy, which facilitate listening to and learning English. Repetition is critical to every stage of reading growth and development.

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\(^1\) This is the /th/ sound that is produced when the vocal chords vibrate during speech.
Strong/Effective Phonics Instruction includes:

- An understanding of the alphabetic principle—systematic relationship between letters and sounds in words.
- A strong phonemic awareness foundation.
- Involving students orally, aurally and through the use of manipulatives.
- Daily and ongoing practice in reading words.
- A growing ownership of words—automatic word recognition.
- Integration of phonics instruction as one part of a comprehensive reading program.
**Direct Instruction**

Utilizing Direct Instruction ensures that students will get the support they need to “own” new skills and concepts. The table below outlines the process used in direct instruction.

| Teacher Explains Task | **Discuss How and When the Skill is to be Used** – Involve students in a conversation concerning why the skill should be learned and applied in their lives.  
**Explain and Demonstrate the Skill** – Use simple yet accurate academic terms to move students to mastery.  
**Engage Every Student** – Provide students with ongoing opportunities to ask questions. Carefully monitor students’ accurate use of all academic and content specific terms. Focus on higher order questions. |
| Teacher Models Task (I do) | **The Teacher (I do)** - Model the new strategy explicitly (work to see the strategy from your students’ current background) and let your students see you use the strategy throughout the day, with lots of “I do it” on the part of the teacher. Students have to be actively engaged throughout the lesson, even when the teacher is “doing”—make sure they are NOT passive listeners. Engage them verbally, with manipulatives, and with response cards: yes/no cards, stop/go cards. Keep an ongoing list of how you keep your students actively involved throughout the lesson; this serves as a “reality check” to make sure students are kept actively engaged/involved, and also provides a quick-reference for effective methods you have used with your students.  
**Explain and Demonstrate the Skill** – Use simple yet accurate academic terms to move students to mastery. “Think Aloud” procedures are most helpful.  
In a “Think Aloud,” the teacher models the thought processes that take place when difficult or unfamiliar material is read aloud. Teachers verbalize their thoughts as they read orally to students. The purpose is to assist students’ comprehension as they gain insight to how the mind can respond to what is known with what is being read.  
Work to increase the complexity of your examples and student work until the work is at grade-level or beyond. Move students to doing their own “Think Aloud.”  
**Engage Every Student** – Provide students with ongoing opportunities to ask questions. Carefully monitor students’ accurate use of all academic and content specific terms. Focus on higher order questions. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher and Student Practice Task Together (we do)</th>
<th><strong>Engage Every Student</strong> – Invite volunteers to attempt the strategy on their own. Give corrective feedback as needed, allowing for follow-up questions. All feedback (including praise) needs to be specific. Carefully monitor students’ accurate use of all academic and content specific terms. Provide students with ongoing opportunities to ask questions. Focus on higher order questions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Student Practice (you do) | **Access Student Ownership** – After many “I do it” and “we do it” examples, ease into “you do it” opportunities under your careful eye. Applying new learning accurately is crucial to future success. Student responses should give you a clear picture of their level of understanding and level of application.  
**Engage Every Student** – Provide students with ongoing opportunities to ask questions. Invite volunteers to attempt the strategy on their own. Give corrective feedback as needed, allowing for follow-up questions. All feedback (including praise) needs to be specific. Carefully monitor students’ accurate use of all academic and content specific terms. Focus on higher order questions.  
**Constructive Feedback** – Remember to begin with less complex examples with the goal of moving to grade level and above examples. Students may work independently, in pairs and or small groups. This is the perfect time for students to verbally state each step of the strategy, while giving their reason for the choices they are making. |
| Scaffolding/Constructive Feedback | **Constructive Feedback** – Remember to begin with less complex examples with the goal of moving to grade level and above examples. Students may work independently, in pairs and or small groups. This is the perfect time for students to verbally state each step of the strategy, while giving their reason for the choices they are making.  
**Scaffolding and Differentiation** – At this time the teacher will need to provide additional opportunities for student practice (with immediate feedback and reteaching—with possible accommodations) to ensure all students have every opportunity to learn.  
**Engage Every Student** – Provide students with ongoing opportunities to ask questions. Give corrective feedback as needed, allowing for follow-up questions. All feedback (including praise) needs to be specific. Carefully monitor students’ accurate use of all academic and content specific terms. Focus on higher order questions. |
Possible Sequence for Teaching Phonics

1. Single consonants and short vowels
   - Start with sound/spellings that occur most commonly in words, especially high-utility sound/spellings. This allows students to begin reading words earlier. Begin with continuous sounds, rather than stops.
   - Examples: /m/, /a/, /s/, /f/, /i/; also /t/, even though it is a stop
   - Then introduce continuous sounds at the beginning or middle of words. These are easier for beginning readers to pronounce and blend than are stops. Ex: /m/ /a/ /p/, map. /f/ /i/ /t/, fit

2. Similar sounds and shapes of letters
   - Do not teach letters having similar sounds within the same lesson.
   - Example: /b/ and /p/ One is voiced and the other is unvoiced. But the mouth, teeth, and tongue are ever so similar.
   - Do not teach letters having similar shapes within the same lesson. Ex: “n” and “h” or “b” and “d”.

3. After single consonants and short vowels, consider teaching the following:
   - Consonant digraphs
   - Long vowels with silent e
   - Long vowels at the end of words
   - y as a vowel
   - r-controlled vowels
   - silent consonants
   - vowel digraphs (vowel teams)
   - variant vowel digraphs and diphthongs

4. Engage students in phonics related activities throughout the day:
   - Through reading by the teacher
   - Through student reading of material that contains the phonics skills which have been practiced in isolation
   - Word play
   - Literacy center activities
   - Use word games as “fillers”—i.e., transition activities—while lining up or waiting for other activities; for example, identifying words that begin or end with the same sound, identifying words with prefixes or suffixes, open or closed syllable words, etc.

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2 In early literacy, a child’s manipulation of sounds, words, and word forms for the purpose of language experimentation and practice.
Alphabetic Principle and Phonics: Reinforcing Letter-Sound Correspondence

The alphabetic principle states that:
- Words are composed of letters that represent sounds, and
- There are systematic relationships between letters and phonemes (letter-sound correspondence).

Students learn to use these relationships to retrieve the pronunciation of known and unknown words.

Following is an example of a manipulative for practicing beginning sounds.

**Materials:** Cardstock, marker

**How to make:**
1. Cut a long, narrow strip of cardstock and write letters for the beginning sounds (onsets) down the length of the card. Choose the onsets you want students to practice. Leave some space between each onset. Also leave some blank space at the top and bottom of the strip.
2. Make a card for the ending part of a word (rime). Write the rime on the right. Next to the rime, on the left, make two horizontal slits in the card where the onset strip will fit.
3. Create as many onset cards and rime strips as you like!

**How to use:**
1. Insert the onset strip into the card with the rime, so the strip is visible next to the rime.
2. Pull the strip until the first onset shows in front of the rime.
3. Have the student say the beginning sound and the rime. Then have the student blend the word.
4. Pull the strip until the next onset shows in front of the rime, and continue.
Using Key Words to Remember Letter Sounds

Key words are a valuable tool for helping students learn and remember certain sounds. A key word typically starts with the targeted letter(s), making the targeted sound. Key words reinforce the alphabetic principle, that words are composed of letters that represent sounds and that there are systematic relationships between letters and phonemes (letter-sound correspondence). Students learn to use these relationships to retrieve the pronunciation of known and unknown words.

You can use sound cards to reinforce the alphabetic principle. Use the following routine:

1. Have students say the letter name.
2. Then say the key word.
3. Repeat the key word, clipping the word immediately after the beginning sound is produced. (In other words, say the beginning sound only.)

To choose key words to assist students in remembering the short sounds of vowels in English:

- Choose words that begin with the sound—not words with the vowel sound within the word.
  
  **EXAMPLE:** For short a /ă/, choose apple, not mat.

- Do not choose words where the vowel is followed by a nasal\(^3\). Words to avoid: ant, insect, ink, umbrella, uncle, etc.

- Choose words that students are tend to pronounce correctly, rather than words they are likely to mispronounce.
  
  **EXAMPLE:** Do not use egg to represent the short sound of “e”. Some children say egg with a beginning sound of long “a”.

- Make sure that the key word clearly articulates the sound. For instance, do not use elephant as a key word for the sound of short e. The short /ĕ/ sound is not clearly articulated at the beginning of the word.

**TIP:**

It is strongly recommended that the same key words are used by all teachers within a school—or even within an entire school district—to provide greater consistency for students, especially those who are struggling.

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\(^3\) A speech sound made as air passes through the nose. The nasal cavity acts as a resonator.
### Key Words for Short Vowels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Name</th>
<th>Key Word/Picture</th>
<th>Sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Apple" /></td>
<td>/ä/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Edge" /></td>
<td>/ë/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Itch" /></td>
<td>/ĭ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Octopus" /></td>
<td>/õ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Up" /></td>
<td>/ʊ/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Words for Consonants

You can use key words to help students learn digraphs, as well as for some consonant sounds, e.g., the /y/ sound as in *yellow*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Name</th>
<th>Key Word/Picture</th>
<th>Sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sh</td>
<td>ship</td>
<td>/sh/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>y</td>
<td>yellow</td>
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References


