# Grade 2 Foundational Skills Instruction: Whole and Small Group Settings

In **second grade**, children develop more advanced phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge, and decoding skill, all of which contribute to the development of fluent reading. These skills are a necessary **foundation** to reach the ultimate goal of reading: **comprehension**.

## Advanced Phoneme Awareness: What is This and Why Does This Matter?

Phoneme awareness is “the ability to understand that sounds in spoken language work together

to make words. Phonemic awareness is auditory; it does not involve printed letters. It includes the

ability to notice, think about, and manipulate the individual phonemes in spoken words. Phonemic

awareness is a type of phonological awareness” ([Foorman et al, 2016](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc_foundationalreading_040717.pdf#page=20)).

As students gain proficiency with phonemic awareness, they progress from relatively easier tasks like isolating the initial phoneme in words to more challenging phoneme awareness tasks like manipulating phonemes within words through deleting and substituting (Stahl & Murray, 1994).

Efficient phonological processing is essential to fluent reading. While many children will enter grade 2 with adequate phonemic awareness, some children are still developing the level of skill needed to manipulate phonemes in words. Brief, active practice with advanced phonemic awareness tasks will support continued development for all students.

For children at risk of [reading difficulties](http://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/reading-difficulties/default.html), instructional approaches that are intensive and explicit in phonemic awareness and phonics have had the greatest impact in preventing long-term difficulties (Torgesen, 2002). In a review of the research on phonemic awareness, Kilpatrick (2016) notes that students experiencing reading difficulties “will not show significant reading gains until they can do all of the advanced phoneme levels quickly and automatically.”

### What Linguistic Factors Might Impact How Students Acquire Advanced Phoneme Skills?

Students have greatest awareness of the sounds in the language or [language variation](https://www.aft.org/ae/summer2021/washington_seidenberg) that they  hear and speak most often, and can connect that awareness to new or unfamiliar sounds in English. Phonological awareness developed in one language has been shown in studies to “cross over” into English, enabling children who have developed awareness in their home language to utilize those skills in English as well ([International Literacy Association](https://www.literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/where-we-stand/9457_Phonological_Awareness_1-2020_Final.pdf), 2020). Beginning phonemic awareness practice with the sounds and patterns that the two languages share is supportive. Instruction can then progress to sounds and patterns that exist in English but not the student’s home language (Helman, 2004).  Additionally, [dialectal variation within American English](https://www.aft.org/ae/summer2021/washington_seidenberg) may result in mismatches between the oral and written language system and could also impact the acquisition of phonics skills.

#### Research-Based Instruction to Support Students in Acquiring Advanced Phoneme Skills

Advanced phonemic tasks can be brief, efficient, and engaging. It takes minimal instructional time in the classroom to practice phonemic manipulation and continue to build advanced phonemic awareness.

##### Resources

* Phonemic Awareness Hand Motions, from Heggerty ([Video Playlist](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqsyZlEkrFNqOwDChnYX8w01C7YzBwa3X))
* Advanced phoneme activities, from Florida Center for Reading Research ([Activities](https://www.fcrr.org/student-center-activities/second-and-third-grade))
* Correct pronunciation of English phonemes, from Rollins Center for Language and Literacy ([Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBuA589kfMg))

#### Advanced Phoneme Awareness: Leveraging Linguistic Assets for Multilingual Learners

* Since it takes multiple years for students to become proficient in a second language, English learners in grades 2-3 are often still developing the English phonemic awareness that is required for fluent reading. ELs without advanced phonemic awareness will experience higher demands on their working memory to decode, limiting access to working memory for comprehension.
* English learners may benefit from supports for hearing and producing sounds in English that are new to them. Instruction in the sounds of English will help English learners develop phonological awareness in English (Bear et al., 2003; Helman, 2004).
* Phonological skills are more closely related to word reading ability than is language-minority status (Lesaux et al, 2008).
* Phonological awareness developed in one language has been shown in studies to translate into English, enabling children who have developed awareness in their home language to utilize those skills in English as well ([International Literacy Association](https://www.literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/where-we-stand/9457_Phonological_Awareness_1-2020_Final.pdf), 2020). Beginning phonemic awareness practice with the sounds and patterns that the two languages share is supportive. Instruction can then progress to sounds and patterns that exist in English but not the student’s home language (Helman, 2004).

##### Supports for English Learners

* Create extensive experiences with fun and appealing songs, poems, chants, and read-alouds that will allow students to hear and reproduce the sound patterns of English.
* Songs and poems, with their rhythm and repetition, are easily memorized and can be used to teach phonemic awareness and print concepts to English learners. In addition to increased retention due to repetition, rhymes allow English learners to safely play with language. These rhymes exist in every language and teachers can ask students or their parents to share these culturally relevant and teachable rhymes with the class to build phonemic awareness activities around them ([Colorín Colorado\*\*](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/english-language-learners-and-five-essential-components-reading-instruction-0))
* Be familiar with the sounds that might be difficult for students of particular language backgrounds to hear or pronounce, and provide extra practice (Helman, 2004).
* Practice phonemic awareness in small groups of 4-6 students when possible (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007).

##### Learn More

* [Phonemic Awareness and English Language Learners\*\*](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/reading-101-english-language-learners#h-phonemic-awareness-and-english-language-learners), from Colorín Colorado
* [Reading 101 for English Language Learners\*\*](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/reading-101-english-language-learners), from Colorín Colorado
* [Phonemic Inventories and Cultural and Linguistic Information Across Languages](https://www.asha.org/practice/multicultural/Phono/#phon), from American Language-Speech-Hearing Association

## Phonics and Decoding: What is This and Why Does This Matter?

**Phonics** is a “way of teaching the code-based portion of reading and spelling that stresses symbol-sound relationships; especially important in beginning reading instruction”([Massachusetts 2017 English Language Arts and Literacy Framework](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/ela/2017-06.pdf), page 180).

**Decoding is “**the ability to translate a word from print to speech, usually by employing knowledge of letter-sound relationships; also the act of deciphering a new word by sounding it out” ([Foorman et al. 2016](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc_foundationalreading_040717.pdf), page 38).

Decoding skills allow readers to “get the print off the page.” When children are skilled decoders they can develop fluent, automatic word reading in order to focus on the real goal of reading: comprehension. Fluent reading in an alphabetic language such as English is not possible without skillful phonic decoding. In a review of the research on early reading instruction, prominent researchers Catherine Snow and Connie Juel concluded that focused instruction on letters and sounds is “helpful for all children, harmful for none, and crucial for some” (Snow & Juel, 2005).

Many children on a typical developmental trajectory will enter grade 2 with basic phonics skills intact, ready to learn to decode words with more complex spelling patterns, and to read increasingly complex text independently. With their growing decoding skills, these students are poised to increase their sight vocabulary as they can read more and more types of words.

Other children will enter grade 2 without solid beginning decoding skills or gaps in first-grade phonics knowledge. For these students, intensive support with plenty of active practice is essential and can effectively put children on a successful trajectory (Torgesen, 2002). These children need [supplemental intervention](http://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/leading-mtss/tiered-instruction.html) while still receiving core instruction in second-grade-level skills.

### What Linguistic Factors Might Impact How Students Acquire Phonics Knowledge and Decoding Skill?

For multilingual learners, teachers should consider if a student’s home language is logographic or syllabic to inform plans to introduce the child to English letters and to make supportive connections to their home language-based knowledge (Bialystok, 2002; Durgunoğlu, 2002). To make supportive connections to a student’s home language, educators may consider:

* How is the home language the same and how is it different from English?
* Are there words in the home language that sound the same and mean the same thing in both languages?
* Are there words in the home language and English that sound the same but mean different things?
* How are words changed and formed in the home language — singular and plural forms, present tense, and past tense forms of verbs? (Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan, 2009, Chapter 3)

English learners may speak with a dialect different than the teacher’s. This can affect the pronunciations of English words. This does not indicate any problem with phonics or decoding acquisition, as long as pronunciations are consistent (Colorín Colorado\*\*). Additionally, students who primarily use a non-mainstream dialect of American English experience a mismatch between their oral language system and the written language system taught in school; this can impact the acquisition of phonics skills.  For example, if within the student’s dialect the final /g/ sound is dropped from words like *jumping* or *going*, phonetically decoding those words will take additional time or instruction so the sound/spelling variation used in instruction can be learned (Seidenberg & Washington, 2021).

#### What does Phonics include in Grade 2?

In second grade, it is recommended that students extend their knowledge of phoneme-grapheme correspondences, including a range of blends, digraphs and trigraphs; and learn to use the six syllable types and additional morphemes to read words. For more specifics, refer to the *LETRS Scope and Sequence for Word Study, Reading, and Spelling* (Moats & Tolman, 2019).

[LETRS sample scope and sequence](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/letrs-scope-sequence.pdf)

#### Research-Based Instruction to Support Skills in Phonics and Decoding in Second Grade

Instruction in phonics and decoding should be systematic and explicit. According to Brady (2011), “Systematic and explicit approaches to phonics instruction have been shown in a range of studies to be more effective than more implicit approaches.” **Systematic** phonics lessons follow a planned sequence from simpler to more complex letter-sound correspondences and spelling patterns, as opposed to teaching phonics rules and patterns incidentally as they arise in text. **Explicit** phonics instruction goes beyond pointing out examples of spelling patterns; it provides explanations of how and when spelling rules and patterns are used (Brady, 2011). Explicit instruction also typically includes a gradual release approach with active practice opportunities for students to transfer and apply the phonics they are learning.

When students are taught new letter-sound correspondences, they should practice applying that knowledge by encoding (i.e., spelling) and decoding words, both in isolation and in connected text. Blending is particularly important to practice as students learn new sound-spelling correspondences and need to practice using them to read real words.

##### Resources

* Phonics activities, from Florida Center for Reading Research ([Activities](https://www.fcrr.org/student-center-activities/second-and-third-grade#sca6))
* Sound-letter mapping, from Literacy How ([Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjvjGnSh5-4&feature=emb_logo))
* Word and sentence dictation, from Anita Archer on explicitinstruction.org ([Video](https://explicitinstruction.org/video-elementary/elementary-video-5/))
* Read and Write Words with Consonant Blends, from National Center on Intensive Intervention ([Instruction](https://intensiveintervention.org/sites/default/files/ConsonantBlends-508.pdf))
* Long and short vowel patterns, National Center for Intensive Intervention ([Instruction](https://intensiveintervention.org/sites/default/files/HideSeek-508.pdf))
* Phonics and Decoding, from Reading Rockets ([Video\*\*](https://www.readingrockets.org/reading-topics/phonics-and-decoding))
* Sounding Out, from Free Reading ([Activities](http://www.freereading.net/wiki/Sounding_Out_Activities.html))

Also, see this collection of brief videos from the Idaho Department of Education within their Literacy Instructional Routines to Support Foundational Skills Instruction:

* Sound-Spelling Card, ([Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvzjXNRm78Q))
* Vowel First Blending, ([Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_UdGCNodpc))
* Vowel First Blending with Multisyllabic Words, ([Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LliijfC0EBg))
* Multisyllable Routine- Identify Familiar Word Parts, ([Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xd_VN73EI7g))
* Sound-Spelling Review, ([Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSpUQXKru8Y))
* Dictation, ([Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0lGyYXhIOM))

#### Practice with Decodable Text

“**Decodable text** is text in which a high proportion of words (80%-90%) comprise letter-sound correspondences that have already been taught. It is used for the purpose of providing practice with specific decoding skills and is a bridge between learning phonics and the application of phonics in independent reading” ([Florida Center for Reading Research, Glossary of Reading Terms](https://www.fcrr.org/node/1016)).

Decodable texts are used to promote transfer of phonics and decoding skills into real text. Teachers use decodable texts for a targeted purpose, as one part of a wide variety of texts students are exposed to throughout instruction. Decodable texts are most beneficial when children are early in their development of phonics knowledge; this timing varies for individual children. When students are learning basic phonics patterns, including those typically taught in kindergarten and first grade, decodable texts support applied practice. In second grade, some children will no longer need to practice in highly controlled texts.

##### Resources

* Teaching with Decodable Text, from 95% Group (recorded [Webinar](https://info.95percentgroup.com/decodables-webinar-replay?submissionGuid=6ca2b22f-d103-4f77-9483-07ef3da3a8ad))
* Decodable Text Sources, from The Reading League ([Resource](https://www.thereadingleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Decodables-Update-November-2020.pdf))
* Decodable Readers Protocol, from Achieve the Core ([Instruction](https://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Decodable%20Reader%20Protocol_2018.pdf))
* [Free online decodable texts](https://portal.flyleafpublishing.com/), from Flyleaf Publishing
* [Free online decodable texts](https://www.speld-sa.org.au/services/phonic-books.html), from SPELD Australia

#### High-frequency Words

“Children must learn to quickly recognize words that appear frequently in all kinds of text, also known as high-frequency words. Because these words occur so often in text, learning to recognize them quickly will speed up the reading process so that students can focus more on the meaning of the text” ([Foorman et al, 2016](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc_foundationalreading_040717.pdf#page=28), page 28).

“Many high-frequency words are ‘grammatical glue’ necessary to form and read sentences, such as *do*, *does*, *were*, *are*, *was*, *of*” (Moats, 2019). High-frequency words may be regularly or irregularly spelled. Irregular words are words that have one or more letter-sound patterns that don’t correspond to their typical sounds. A majority of high-frequency words are regular or have just one irregular letter-sound pattern. Whether high-frequency words are regular or irregular, they should be taught associated with their spelling, sounds, and meaning, and **not** memorized as a single unit by “sight” (Moats & Tolman, 2019).

##### Resources

* Strategies for Teaching Irregular “Tricky Words,” from The Reading League ([Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2F1_CNImec))
* A New Model for Teaching High-Frequency Words, from Reading Rockets([Instruction\*\*](https://www.readingrockets.org/article/new-model-teaching-high-frequency-words))
* High Frequency Words, from Literacy Instructional Routines to Support Foundational Skills Instruction, Idaho Department of Education ([Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-e9jbig1dgI))

#### Phonics and Decoding: Leveraging Linguistic Assets for Multilingual Learners

* Teachers should work with a child and their family to understand what literacy skills the child already developed in the home language. Many literacy skills built in the home language can “transfer” and support developing English literacy. For instance, once the concept of matching a symbol with a sound has been learned, it can be applied to new languages ([Colorín Colorado\*\*](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/fostering-literacy-development-english-language-learners)).
* Systematic phonics instruction is effective in helping ELs learn to decode words, even students at lower levels of English language proficiency. However, decoding alone does not facilitate reading comprehension if students' oral language proficiency is not developed to the level of the texts they are expected to read (Helman, 2004; Droop & Verhoeven, 2003).
* English learners may have alphabet knowledge in a home language with similarities and differences from English. A child’s home language may use the same letters as English but have different names and sounds for each letter (e.g., Spanish). Or a child’s home language may use a different alphabet and English letters are not yet familiar (e.g., Cyrillic alphabet).
* ELs may feel anxious and/or frustrated about attempting to produce sounds in English. A supportive environment helps lower affective filter and promotes risk taking (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).
* During small-group time, provide extra practice opportunities with the sounds or sound patterns that are different from the student’s primary language, keeping in mind that precision from students will develop over time (Instruction Partners, 2021).

##### Supports for English Learners

* “An effective phonics program for English language learners uses a synthetic approach that follows a defined sequence and includes direct teaching of a set of letter-sound relationships” (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007).
* Empower students by explicitly teaching English letter-sound correspondences. Teach phonics explicitly using a multi-sensory approach, which may include tools such as manipulative tiles ([Foorman et al. 2016](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc_foundationalreading_040717.pdf#page=28)).
* Combine phonics and decoding instruction with intensive development of the oral language English Learners need for comprehension (Gersten & Geva, 2003).
* Teach the meaning and use of high-frequency words when teaching students to recognize them in print ([Foorman et al. 2016](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc_foundationalreading_040717.pdf#page=28)).
* Pre-teaching vocabulary is an important part of good phonics instruction with ELs so that students aren't trying to figure out new vocabulary items out of context ([Colorín Colorado\*\*](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/reading-101-english-language-learners#h-phonics-and-english-language-learners)).

##### Learn More

* [Phonics Challenges and Strategies for ELs\*\*](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/reading-101-english-language-learners#h-phonics-and-english-language-learners), from Colorín Colorado
* [What Does Research Tell Us About Teaching Reading to English Language Learners?\*\*](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/what-does-research-tell-us-about-teaching-reading-english-language-learners), from Colorín Colorado

## Fluency: What is This and Why Does This Matter?

“Reading **fluency** refers to efficient, effective word-recognition skills that permit a reader to construct the meaning of text. Fluency is manifested in *accurate, rapid, expressive oral reading* and is applied during, and makes possible, silent reading comprehension” ([Pikulski & Chard, 2005](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/250055749_Fluency_Bridge_Between_Decoding_and_Reading_Comprehension)).

Fluent reading is necessary for the ultimate goal of reading: comprehension. Labored decoding and recognition of words drains cognitive energy and attention away from the language and meaning of the text (Perfetti et al. 1996; [Pikulski & Chard, 2005](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/250055749_Fluency_Bridge_Between_Decoding_and_Reading_Comprehension)).

### Automatic Word Recognition is a Foundation of Fluency

All fluent readers can instantly and automatically recognize a large number of words, which researchers call the “sight vocabulary.” This sight vocabulary is a foundation of fluent reading. “[W]hen a reader has learned a ‘sight word,’ she can retrieve the spelling, pronunciation, and meaning of that word as soon as her eyes alight upon it (Pace Miles & Ehri, 2019). A reader must be able to decode a word, and connect the spelling to its sound and its meaning, to add it to long-term sight memory. Once basic decoding skills are “up and running,” readers can begin rapidly adding new words to the sight vocabulary as they encounter, read, and learn them through reading practice. This process is called *orthographic mapping*. Repeated oral reading is a proven practice to build fluency, once students have these basic decoding skills in place ([National Reading Panel](https://www.nichd.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pubs/nrp/Documents/report.pdf), 2000, page 3-3).

#### Resources for Supporting the Development of Fluency

* Word Recognition, from Free Reading ([Activities](http://www.freereading.net/wiki/Word_Recognition_Activities.html))
* Fluency activities, from Florida Center for Reading Research ([Activities](https://www.fcrr.org/student-center-activities/second-and-third-grade#sca8))
* Connected text, from Free Reading ([Activities](http://www.freereading.net/wiki/Fluency_Activities.html))
* Phrase Fluency, from Barksdale Reading Institute ([Instruction](https://400f2aef-4be2-403b-91c6-580a05e2cbbf.filesusr.com/ugd/8a72e3_e915be2bf3344644bebfe58ffdee32cf.pdf))
* Repeated Reading for Accuracy, from The Barksdale Reading Institute ([Instruction](https://400f2aef-4be2-403b-91c6-580a05e2cbbf.filesusr.com/ugd/8a72e3_6d164c47d3fb407ebeccf18a1e86a11f.pdf))

#### Fluency: Leveraging Linguistic Assets for Multilingual Learners

Fluency is not just speed but also expression. Reading that is rapid but lacks expression and comprehension is not fluent. “Even though fluency instruction is important, teachers must remember that many ELLs can be deceptively fast and accurate while reading in English without fully comprehending the meaning of the text they are reading. That is because reading comprehension depends upon a variety of complex skills that are not as important to word reading. These include deep vocabulary knowledge, syntactical knowledge, and background knowledge of the subject discussed in the text” ([Colorín Colorado\*\*](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/ells-and-reading-fluency-english)).

##### Supports for English Learners

* Repeated oral reading activities with feedback and guidance provide English learners with practice to develop word recognition and confidence (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007).
* Allow students to practice reading along with a recorded text; build background knowledge to support comprehension and vocabulary; use questions after reading to process information ([Colorín Colorado\*\*](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/reading-101-english-language-learners)).

### Sources of Information for Educators: Foundational Skills in Grade 2

* Duke, N. and Mesmer, H. A. [Phonics Faux Pas: Avoiding Instructional Missteps in Teaching Letter-Sound Relationships](https://www.aft.org/ae/winter2018-2019/duke_mesmer), from American Educator (2018).
* [Foundational Skills Guidance](https://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Foundational%20Skills%20Guidance%20Document.pdf), from Achieve the Core
* Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade, from the Institute of Education Sciences ([Research and information](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc_foundationalreading_040717.pdf#page=20), [Video playlist](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVHqsnePfULo3KA8dspX6558xwZxVr2rB), [Guide for PLCs](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southeast/plc.asp))
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* Orthographic Mapping: What It Is and Why It’s Important, from the Reading League ([video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfRHcUeGohc))
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* MS Word download [The Role of Orthographic Mapping in Learning to Read](http://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/literacy-block/foundational-skills/orthographic-mapping.docx), from Keys to Literacy [download]
* Torgesen, J. [Avoiding the Devastating Downward Spiral: The Evidence That Early Intervention Prevents Reading Failure](https://www.aft.org/periodical/american-educator/fall-2004/avoiding-devastating-downward-spiral), from American Educator (2004).
* Teaching Children To Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction, from the National Reading Panel ([full report](https://www.nichd.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pubs/nrp/Documents/report.pdf); [brief summary](https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/nrp/findings))
* What Is Phonological Awareness, from Understood.org ([Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0G6teawxls))

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