

Module 3: Exploring Phonics and Word Study

Module Description

The goal of this module is to provide an overview of phonics and spelling instruction, the syllable structure of English, and strategies for teaching multisyllabic words. This module also includes information about morphology, including how to use prefixes, suffixes, and roots to read unknown words. This scope is also known as word study: information about the alphabetic, pattern, and meaning layers of English orthography (Blevins, 2017; Moats, 2019; Williams et al., 2009).

In this module, we will connect with what you learned in Module 1 regarding the science of reading, the conceptual models related to the science of reading, the five components of effective reading instruction, how the brain learns to read, and strategies to support word reading difficulties.

This module is suitable for kindergarten through third grade teachers, as well as fourth through twelfth grade teachers who wish to expand their students' knowledge of advanced word study concepts. Additionally, it offers guidance on basic phonics instruction for struggling readers, along with strategies for intensive intervention.

School leaders will consider the topic of leading phonics and word study that is centered around data-driven decision-making, observations in classrooms, and coaching feedback. You will also consider how these processes inform collective and collaborative inquiry about the effective teaching and learning of phonics/spelling—important processes for ensuring teacher growth and improved student learning.

Module Objectives

In this module, participants will learn the following:

- The structure of language
- Orthography
- The broad outline of historical influences on English spelling patterns, especially Anglo-Saxon, Latin (Romance), and Greek
- The grapheme as a functional correspondence unit or representation of a phoneme
- How to recognize and explain common orthographic rules and patterns in English
- The difference between high-frequency and irregular words
- How to identify, explain, and categorize the six basic syllable types in English spelling
- Morphology
- How to identify and categorize common morphemes in English, including Anglo-Saxon compounds, inflectional suffixes, and derivational suffixes; Latin-based prefixes, roots, and derivational suffixes; and Greek-based combining forms
- How to administer and interpret assessments for planning instruction

- The differences among screening, diagnostic, outcome, and progress-monitoring assessments
- The range of skills typically assessed in terms of phonological skills, decoding skills, oral reading skills, spelling, and writing
- The content and purposes of the most common diagnostic tests used by psychologists and educational evaluators
- The reciprocal relationship among phonological processing, reading, spelling, and vocabulary
- The principles of effective assessments, intervention, and instruction for adolescent students with word-reading and spelling deficits
- Phonics and word-recognition knowledge related to reading
- How to know or recognize the appropriate sequence of phonics concepts from basic to advanced
- The principles of explicit and direct teaching: model, lead, give guided practice, and review
- The rationale for multisensory and multimodal techniques
- The routines of a complete lesson format, from the introduction of a word-recognition concept to fluent application in meaningful reading and writing
- Research-based adaptations of instruction for students with weaknesses in working memory, attention, executive function, or processing speed
- Leaders will use data collected from interim/benchmark assessments and literacy walk-throughs for effective instruction of phonics/spelling to guide decisions around coaching and professional development.
- Leaders will consider a process of conducting observations using a walk-through tool with specifics to look for to help make coaching and professional development decisions.

Module Outline

Section 1: Introduction

Introduction (required)

Welcome to Module 3, Exploring Phonics and Word Study. This module is the third of six online modules in Colorado's Building a Strong Foundation for Lifelong Literacy Success, a professional learning series aimed at supporting teachers' efforts to promote reading achievement in kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Here are the modules in this course:

- Module 1: Understanding the Science of Reading
- Module 2: Building Oral Language and Phonology
- Module 3: Exploring Phonics and Word Study
- Module 4: Creating Fluent Readers
- Module 5: Developing Vocabulary
- Module 6: Increasing Reading Comprehension

School leaders are provided with the same professional development that k-12 educators take. Some sections are marked required and some are optional. School leaders must complete the required sections and subsections. The optional sections are available for school leaders as a reference.

Pre-Assessment (required)

Section 2: Phonics and Systematic Word Study: A Critical Component of Effective Literacy Instruction

Section Overview (optional)

This section introduces terminology related to phonics instruction. The section will provide the rationale for teaching fundamental phonics skills to students in kindergarten through third grade and those who are experiencing difficulty in reading, as well as for teaching advanced skills to older students. Connections to conceptual models of reading development and difficulties—The Simple View of Reading, Scarborough’s Reading Rope, and the Four-Part Processing Model for word recognition—will be reviewed in relation to phonics and spelling. Finally, Ehri’s Phases of Reading Development will be explored to set the stage for an in-depth look at phonics and word study throughout the subsequent sections of this module.

Why Phonics? (optional)

In this introductory subsection, you will learn the rationale for teaching phonics and build your knowledge about the essential use of direct and explicit instruction.

Revisiting the Conceptual Models (optional)

In this subsection, you will engage in an activity to identify where phonics fits into the conceptual models of the Simple View of Reading, Scarborough’s Reading Rope, and the Four-Part Processing Model for word recognition.

Introduction to Ehri’s Phases of Reading Development (optional)

In this subsection, you will view a multimedia presentation, taking an in-depth look at Ehri’s Phases of Reading Development; read an article, “How Children Learn to Read Words”; review writing samples; and listen to students read to determine their phase of reading development.

Check for Understanding (optional)

Section 3: Phonics and Early Reading Instruction

Section Overview (optional)

In this section, a model of a multisensory phonics lesson will be presented along with the progression and sequence of skills that move from simple to complex. Early phonics skills will be explored within this section and Section 4. You will also be provided with a general layout for the phonics lesson in this

section. Later sections of this module will take the learner into more advanced concepts.

This section will provide an overview of the scope and sequence and the components of the multisensory, explicit, and systematic approach to introducing phonics and spelling. This section is intended only to give the learner a sense of the scope and depth of teaching using a structured literacy approach. A suggested broad scope and sequence of instruction is included.

Phonics: Where Do We Begin? (optional)

In this introductory subsection, you will learn about five non-negotiable practices and knowledge tools for your teacher toolbox and the appropriate sequence and progression of phonics instruction at each grade level.

The Rationale for Systematic Explicit Multisensory Phonics Instruction (optional)

This subsection provides an introduction to structured literacy and provides the instructional principles that create the foundation for effective instruction. You will read the article “Structured Literacy and Typical Literacy Practices: Understanding Differences to Create Instructional Opportunities.”

The Components of an Effective Phonics and Spelling Lesson (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn the parts of an effective phonics lesson. You’ll review an example lesson that highlights each of these components and provides an instructional routine along with timing. You will also learn about the most important element of phonics instruction for adolescent students and read an article, “What Does English Tell Us About Teaching Reading to English Language Learners?”

Allocation of Instructional Time (optional)

When creating and implementing lesson plans, it is important to consider your use of instructional time. In this subsection, you read an article, “What’s the Role of Amount of Reading Instruction”, about the role of amount of reading instruction and respond.

Making Instruction Integrated and Multisensory (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn strategies for creating multi-sensory routines for lessons. You will learn about visual prompts and strategies, auditory prompts and strategies, and kinesthetic-tactile prompts and strategies.

Check for Understanding (optional)

Section 4: Teaching Beginning Phonics and Spelling

Section Overview (optional)

This section is dedicated to the exploration of early phonics and spelling skills and will provide you with an overview of the procedures for teaching the decoding and encoding (spelling) of phonetically regular

words. This section will also walk you through blending sounds to create words, phoneme-grapheme mapping, and using decodable text in your everyday lessons. In this section, you will learn activities that you can start using in your classrooms immediately. The content in this section provides the foundational knowledge needed to introduce and teach reading concepts to early learners and to support gaps in older students' literacy skills.

Teaching Decoding and Spelling (optional)

This introductory subsection reviews the key elements needed for teaching decoding skills and provides you with ideas on how to start teaching the task of mapping the sounds of language onto print.

Phonics for English Learners: Connecting Phonemes to Graphemes (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn about transferable sounds and the non-transferable sounds you might need to devote more time teaching for English Learners. You will view a chart that provides those in Spanish that transfer to English, and those that do not.

Keywords (optional)

Not all words are the same when it comes to teaching sounds! In this subsection, you will learn the best keywords to use when teaching short vowel sounds.

Teaching Decoding for Phonetically Regular Words (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn activities for teaching early letter sounds and then moving into word reading. You will have the opportunity to view a video of decoding instruction and will choose from three different videos at varying levels of instruction.

Blending Sounds Together to Read Whole Words (optional)

Some students have great difficulty blending sounds into words. In this subsection, you will learn blending routines for some of the more complex blends and digraphs.

Consonant Blends, Digraphs, and Other Early Phonics Skills (optional)

Consonant blends are sometimes difficult for students because they are difficult to pronounce. In this subsection, you will review consonant blends and routines for teaching them explicitly and directly, learn about digraphs, and review a handout and routines for teaching consonant digraphs.

Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn two methods of adding phoneme-grapheme mapping (PGM) to your daily lessons. The first is a more structured, systematic, comprehensive approach that includes review and practice at the phoneme-grapheme to word-to-phrase level. The second method is a way for you to quickly do phoneme-grapheme mapping activities within daily routines.

Using Decodable Text to Reinforce Basic Reading Skills (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn about the value of using decodable text, explore an example of decodable text, and learn how to select appropriate text for instruction, including considerations when using high/low readers with adolescents. You will also view a video that depicts a small group reading decodable words in isolation and also in connected text.

Check for Understanding (optional)

Section 5: Syllable Structure of English: Six Syllable Types

Section Overview (optional)

This section of the module begins with learning the six syllable types along with techniques to teach students in a sequential step-by-step manner. Next, the combining of syllables is presented with concrete examples of the procedures for teaching students. Teachers will learn about some of the advanced phonics skills of spelling by position within a word, the role of schwa in multisyllabic words, and the consistency of final stable syllables. The last sections of Module 3 explain the syllable division patterns and the steps for teaching patterns for reading unknown words.

Definition of a Syllable and an Overview of the Six Syllable Types of English (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn about syllables, the six syllable types, and why they are important for reading and spelling. You will also engage in a syllable sort activity to test your knowledge of the syllable types.

Teaching the Definition of a Syllable (optional)

Once students have begun reading words and can distinguish between vowels and consonants, they can begin to learn about syllables. In this subsection, you will learn how to introduce students to syllables and the specific characteristics of each one. You will also get to engage in a variety of syllable sort activities and practice completing a syllable sort using words from a connected text.

Combining Syllables (optional)

Combining syllables is a word analysis skill that begins soon after a student learns to read connected text. In this subsection, you will view downloadable activities for combining syllables.

The Final Stable Syllable Endings (optional)

A final syllable that typically has a nonphonetic spelling, but its pronunciation is stable, is called a final stable syllable ending. In this subsection, you will learn to recognize these syllables to boost student learning of this type of syllable and spelling accuracy and watch a video that provides additional information about final stable syllables.

The Role of Schwa in Multisyllabic Words (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn about the schwa sound vowels and how to teach them.

Strategies for Reading Longer Words: Syllable Division (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn about the divisions and patterns for reading longer, multisyllabic words. You will learn the four basic division patterns.

Teaching Students How to Divide Syllables (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn how to teach students to unlock multisyllabic words and how to help students to use this strategy to independently read longer words. You will also have the opportunity to identify and label syllables in multisyllabic words via an interactive tool.

Check for Understanding (optional)

Section 6: Irregular and High-Frequency Words

Section Overview (optional)

In this section, participants will learn how to build their students' orthographic mapping and memory for irregular words, as well as differentiate irregular words from high-frequency words. Students will also be introduced to strategies to teach irregular words for reading and spelling. Finally, the importance of instant word recognition and its impact on automaticity for reading and writing will be presented with engaging strategies for teaching them.

Teaching Irregular Words for Reading and Spelling (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn a technique for helping students to read irregular words and review a handout for teaching that routine.

Instant Word Recognition of Irregularly Spelled Words (optional)

Instant word recognition is the goal of irregular word instruction. In this subsection, you will learn how to use a rapid word recognition chart to help students master irregular words.

Review and Reinforcement of Irregular Words (optional)

In this subsection, you will review activities to increase the practice of words to help students acquire automatic word retrieval, and sample phrases and sentences that incorporate those words.

How Research Has Informed Practice (optional)

In this subsection, you will review what you have learned about sight words, high-frequency words, and irregular words, and the importance of teaching them through literacy strategies and repeated exposure.

Irregular Words vs. High-Frequency Words (optional)

Most irregular words can be learned once a pattern has been taught; however, there are irregular words

with no recognizable patterns, and these words are considered to be highly irregular. In this subsection, you will distinguish between words that are non-decodable and those that can be partially decoded.

Check for Understanding (optional)

Section 7: Morphology: Word Parts and Word Building

Section Overview (optional)

In this section, learners will connect the history of English to the concept of meaningful word parts. The connection between word meaning and prefixes, roots, and suffixes will be explained. A concise overview of teaching morphology to learners will be described, and suffixes and their complexities will be discussed. The goal is for teachers to gain an understanding of common morphemes and how they are categorized by language of origin and meaning parts. Additionally, teachers will gain an understanding of strategies for teaching this level of word study.

The History of English IS Important (optional)

This subsection will provide you with a glimpse into the origins of phonology, morphology, orthography, and semantics. This knowledge will help your students to further understand spelling and speech sounds patterns. You will also download two articles for further study, review a word origins chart, learn about the Anglo-Saxon influence on the English language, and learn why some letters are silent.

What Is Morphology and Why Is It Important for Reading, Spelling, and Comprehension? (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn the definitions of morphology and morpheme.

Word Structure: Prefixes, Roots, Suffixes, and Combining Forms (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn about the language of morphology, including bound morphemes, free morphemes, and the meaning of prefixes, suffixes, base words, affixes, and combining forms. You will watch a multimedia presentation and learn about Latin and Greek word structures and how to build words using Latin roots and Greek combining forms.

What to Teach Students about Prefixes, Roots, and Suffixes (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn how to teach students to create new words by adding a prefix or suffix to base words, review a simple list of basic affixes and their meanings, and complete activities to review and reinforce teaching of morphemes. You will complete an activity using connected text to determine affixes to teach, complete an interactive activity to count morphemes, learn strategies to easily identify and read the morphemes in words, and learn the three pronunciations of the suffix *-ed*.

Strategies for Teaching Morphemes (optional)

This content outlines strategies for teaching students to read and analyze multisyllabic words by focusing on morphemes—prefixes, suffixes, and root words—using routines like “peeling off affixes” and structured strategies such as BEST and SPLIT. These methods must be explicitly taught and

practiced through increasingly complex tasks, including reading words in context and applying strategies to connected texts. Word sorts, whether open or closed, provide a powerful, cross-content activity to help students compare and categorize words based on morphological patterns and deepen vocabulary understanding.

Three Orthographic Rules for Adding Suffixes: “The Three Great Rules” (optional)

Doubling, Drop e, and Change y to i are known as the “Three Great Rules.” In this subsection, you will learn rules and routines for spelling changes to words when adding suffixes.

Check for Understanding (optional)

Section 8: Adolescent Intensive Intervention

Section Overview (optional)

This section will focus on best practices for accelerating reading growth for our most fragile students: specifically, adolescent learners with severe deficits who are in need of word study and other foundational skills instruction.

Addressing the Struggling Reader (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn about adolescent readers who struggle, and review the characteristics of both struggling and successful readers.

Intensive Intervention Instruction (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn about the characteristics of students requiring intensive intervention, assessments for intervention, and what it means to intervene with intensity. You will explore the characteristics of what we know to be best practices for providing instruction to struggling readers. You will also view four recommendations from a What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) guidance document on intensive instruction recommendations and specifically look at the word study for older struggling readers. Lastly, you will read a blog, “I’m a High School Reading Resource Teacher, What Should I Do?” and complete a reflection.

Literacy Intervention for English Learners Who Struggle with Reading (optional)

Like any other population of learners with academic difficulties, English Learners who struggle with reading require effective instructional approaches and interventions. In this subsection, you will learn more about those approaches and effective interventions by watching a video, “Reading Basics with Fifth Grade Newcomers” and reading a blog, “Phonics for English Learners?”

Check for Understanding (optional)

Section 9: Assessing Phonics and Spelling

Section Overview (optional)

In this section, we will focus on the importance of the assessment of reading (decoding) and spelling (encoding). You will be introduced to the assessment cycle and we will provide examples of the tools available for assessing reading and spelling. By the end of this section, you will know more about the diagnostic process and how to group students for instruction based on diagnostic data. This section will specifically look at assessment in decoding and spelling as deficits in these areas lead to deficits in all areas of reading and writing.

The Assessment Cycle (optional)

In this subsection, you will review the parts of the assessment cycle and learn how they are used to assess reading and spelling development.

Universal Screener(optional)

In this subsection, you will examine the use of screeners to determine students at risk who need further diagnostic assessment in decoding. You will explore the San Diego Quick Assessment (SDQA), be provided links to other example screeners, and learn about encoding screeners.

Diagnostic Assessment (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn more about diagnostic assessment tools for decoding and encoding and their connection to instruction. You will view videos on administering a decoding diagnostic and check your knowledge of interpreting an assessment. Lastly, you'll be introduced to encoding inventories and their importance to include as a diagnostic assessment.

Progress Monitoring (optional)

In this subsection, you will learn more about progress monitoring of instruction and interventions for phonics and complete an activity to group students.

Check for Understanding (optional)

Section 10: Leading Phonics and Word Study

Section Overview (required)

In this section, you will consider the topic of leading phonics and word study that is centered around data-driven decision-making, observations in classrooms, and coaching feedback. You will also consider how these processes inform collective and collaborative inquiry about the effective teaching and learning of phonics/spelling—important processes for ensuring teacher growth and improved student learning.

Data-Driven Decisions: The Phonics/Spelling Health of Students (required)

The student's ability to map sound to print is another important aspect of becoming a skilled reader. Decoding (sounding out words) and encoding (spelling) are two sides of a coin in terms of word-level knowledge. Data provides information on how students are matching sound to print and representing sound in print.

School Leader Literacy Walk-Through and Observation: Phonics/Spelling (required)

In this subsection we will take a look at the handout, Example Literacy Walk-Through Science of Literacy: Phonics/Spelling

Coaching Guide for Phonics/Spelling (required)

In this subsection, we will refamiliarize ourselves with coaching, with a focus on phonics and spelling. Please read the handout, Example Coaching Guide for Phonics/Spelling.

Professional Learning and Phonics/Spelling (required)

School leaders will reflect on the benchmark and classroom walk-through data discussed in previous subsections..

Check for Understanding (required)

Section 11: Closing Activities

Section Overview (optional)

In this module, you have learned the what, why, and how for the teaching of decoding, spelling, syllable types, morphology, and the assessment process.

Put It into Practice (optional)

This activity includes a reflection on what you learned in Module 1 using a 3-2-1 strategy.

Post-Assessment (required)

Module Feedback (required)

Resource Library

Section 12: Module Completion

Module Completion (required)