Phonics and Decoding

PRINCETON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

What Are Phonics and Decoding?

Phonics is connecting sounds (phonemes) with letters or groups of letters (graphemes). It helps students decode words by breaking them down into smaller parts.

Decoding means using phonics knowledge to sound out and read words on a page.

Why Are Phonics and Decoding Important?

When students learn how letter patterns connect to sounds, they become better readers and writers.
This strong foundation helps students move on to more complex skills like sounding out unfamiliar mulitsyllable words, and writing accurately to express their thoughts.

Phonics Skills By Grade

Kindergarten

- Read short vowel (CVC) words like cat
- Start reading words with digraphs (sh, th,ch, ck, wh,ph) and blends (st,cl, fl, br, cr, sl)
- Learn the difference between consonants and vowels
- Practice closed and open syllable types

Benchmark Words/Minute
Fall: 4
Winter: 27
Spring: 42

First Grade

- Read CVC, digraph, and blend words with ease
- Read long vowel words like cake (CVCe)
- Read words with common vowel teams (ai, ee, oa)
- Begin exploring tricky vowel teams (ea, ow, ue) and r-controlled vowels (ar, or)
- Practice all 6 syllable types in simple words

Benchmark Words/Minute
Fall: 14
Winter: 37
Spring: 66

Second Grade

- Confidently read all first-grade patterns
- Master tricky vowel teams (ea, ow, ue) and r-controlled vowels (ar, or, ur, er, ir)
- Know the jobs of y (sunny) and e (ice)
- Use 6 syllable types to decode longer (multisyllable) words
- Read and understand common prefixes and suffixes like *un-, -ed, -ful, -tion*

Benchmark Words/Minute
Fall: 56
Winter: 84
Spring: 101

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Third Grade

- Identify and know the meaning of and read words with common phonics patterns and common prefixes and suffixes.
- Decode multi-syllabic words.
- Read grade-level irregularly-spelled words, including high-frequency words, in and out of context, with accuracy and automaticity.
- Read grade-level texts fluently with sufficient accuracy, rate and expression to support comprehension (Fall: 87 WPM, Winter: 110 WPM, Spring: 125 WPM)

Fourth Grade

- Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.
- Use knowledge of letter-sound correspondences, syllabication patterns and word origin (Anglo-Saxon roots) to decode and comprehend unfamiliar multi-syllabic words in and out of context.
- Read grade-level texts fluently with sufficient accuracy, rate and expression to support comprehension (Fall: 115 WPM, Winter: 133 WPM, Spring: 147 WPM)

Fifth Grade

- Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.
- Use knowledge of letter-sound correspondences, syllabication patterns and word origin (French and Latin roots) to decode and comprehend unfamiliar multi-syllabic words in and out of context.
- Read grade-level texts fluently with sufficient accuracy, rate and expression to support comprehension (Fall: 132 WPM, Winter: 149 WPM, Spring: 162 WPM)

What Are the 6 Syllable Types?

Understanding syllable types helps students break longer words into syllables so they can read them more easily.

- **Closed** – one vowel followed by a consonant(s). The vowel sound is short. (*cat, maps, chick*)
- **Open** – ends in a vowel that says its name. The vowel sound is long. (*go*, *me, pho-to, po-ta-to*)
- **Silent e** – a final e makes the vowel say its name. The vowel sound is long. (*cake*, *ride*)
- **Vowel team** – two vowels that make one sound. The vowel sound is long. (*rain*, *boat, thread*)
- **R-controlled** – a vowel followed by r. The vowel sound is attached to the /r/. (*car*, *bird, corn-er*)
- **Consonant-le** – ends with -le which spells the sound /l/. (*bubble*, *candle*)