

ALPHABETICS

Challenges	Possible Solutions
<p>What do I need to remember as I plan and deliver alphabetics lessons?</p>	<p>Keep the overall goal of alphabetics instruction in mind: To improve accurate and automatic decoding of printed words into meaningful, spoken words. The focus is on word recognition – not perfect pronunciation.</p>
<p>Students are resentful of being in alphabetics; they see it as babyish and/or refuse to “buy in” to instruction.</p> <p>Some of my ELLs do not see the “big picture” or importance of learning alphabetics.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fully explain the value of alphabetics and its strong interrelationships with fluency (reading words accurately and smoothly in text), vocabulary (recognizing words and their meanings), and comprehension (understanding the intended meaning of text). 2. Present real-life or work-related words requiring multi-syllable decoding skills (superstore, detour, permission, conference, electronic, assemble, register, etc.) 3. Most (if not all) students eventually appreciate alphabetics instruction due to improvements in their reading and spelling skills. 4. Be sure to support alphabetics instruction with guided readings of interesting and relevant texts. This is concrete application of word study to “real” reading.
<p>I am uncomfortable teaching alphabetics. I am unfamiliar with how to do it right. I am unsure about my modeling.</p> <p>My students and I do not know the “language” of alphabetics (vowels, consonants, digraphs, syllables, etc.).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Many STAR/EBRI teachers report feeling uncomfortable, unfamiliar, or unsure when teaching alphabetics. Although we are proficient readers, we learned to read a while ago and have internalized the English code. 2. Begin with short (15-20 minute) lessons, offer them regularly (2-4x/week), and use recommended alphabetics materials. Give yourself (and your students) time to gain comfort with the newness of word study. 3. You don’t have to use alphabetics language with students. Simply call each new letter-sound-syllable-prefix-suffix-root a <u>pattern</u>. Explain that knowing more English patterns (or chunks) will help them decode more words. 4. Use <i>Megawords 1</i> for teaching compounds and syllable types/rules and <i>Megawords 2</i> for teaching suffixes and prefixes. Each unit begins with a word list, explains the pattern(s), and offers (too) Worksheet pages (be selective!). 5. Use the scripted resource, <i>Making Sense of Decoding and Spelling: An Adult Course of Study (MSDS)</i>, available for FREE at http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/making_sense

I don't feel I have the knowledge and expertise to plan or teach alphabetics.	Teaching alphabetics does get easier over time and with experience. You will be encouraged by your students' ability to read and spell many more words.
Where do I begin? What is the scope and sequence of intermediate/advanced alphabetics?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A common intermediate/advanced alphabetics sequence is: (1) compound words, (2) syllable types and syllabication rules, (3) prefixes and suffixes, (4) common Latin roots and Greek forms. 2. For students at Alphabetics Mastery Levels 4-6, start with compound words (generally known and a good introduction to chunking), progress to syllable types and rules, and then move on to prefixes and suffixes. 3. For students at Alphabetics Mastery Levels 7-8, consider starting with common Latin roots and Greek forms. Combining them with prefixes and suffixes results in many academic or scholarly words.
What is the length of a "good" alphabetics lesson? How often should I teach alphabetics?	The research says that lessons are best delivered intensively (15-30 minutes/day), frequently (3-5x/week), and over an extended time (months to even years). However, if you can only offer reading class 1-2x/week, that drives the frequency of your alphabetics lessons.
How do I maintain students' interest over time?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Because it takes time to learn or fill in the gaps of alphabetics, provide regular encouragement and celebrate successes. 2. When new students enter your alphabetics group, <u>do not</u> go back and re-teach skills. Keep moving forward along the continuum of compounds, syllables, prefixes, suffixes, and roots. There is overlap; for example, just teaching open and closed syllables accounts for 75% of prefixes and suffixes! 3. Limit the number of new patterns taught during the week – just in case students' lack of interest is from feeling overwhelmed. 4. Once again, be sure to support word study with guided readings of interesting and relevant texts.
Some of my students learn faster and seem bored.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Present some of the 2-3 syllable words for spelling practice, which is often more challenging. 2. Further challenge the quick learners with related 4-5-6 syllable words to read and spell.

<p>What do I do with students in need of phonics instruction?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check out FREE, printable phonics resources from http://atlasabe.org/resources/ebri/ebri-alphabetics 2. Go to http://www.starfall.com, a free website designed to teach children to read with phonics, but useful for adults. 3. Go to http://www.abcfastphonics.com, a free phonics tutorial with sounds and cartoons for all ages. 4. Go to http://www.stickyball.net/esl-phonics-printables.html, a free source of printable ESL phonics handouts, worksheets, and flashcards. 5. Go to www.soundcityreading.net, a free source of sequential phonics materials from the readiness level to 2nd grade.
<p>How do I know and trust if volunteers are capable of teaching phonics?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Model and guide their use of multisensory phonics instruction for all new sounds and words: see (visual), hear (aural), say (or read), and write (or spell). 2. Look into MLC's online courses at http://online.themlc.org/ and trainings at http://www.mnliteracy.org/ 3. Share the handout <i>Alphabetics Instruction for STAR/EBRI Volunteers</i> at http://atlasabe.org/resources/ebri/ebri-alphabetics
<p>My students have a difficult time with pronunciation due to dialect differences or accents.</p>	<p>A reasonable goal for ELLs is understandable word reading, which supports recognition of spoken words and their meanings.</p>
<p>Sometimes when I am teaching alphabetics, my non-native, English speaking students tell me "we can't hear the sounds."</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be sure to segment small words into sounds and big words into syllables clearly. This is not easy as we naturally blend sounds and syllables for speaking and reading. 2. Model and repeat all sounds, syllables, or words several times and have students watch your face, mouth, and lips. 3. Provide mirrors for students to see and hear themselves make modeled sounds, syllables, or words. 4. Write the sounds, syllables, and words you are saying and students are hearing on the board. 5. Consider audio-taping word list patterns so that students can listen privately as often as needed. 6. Provide minimal pair practice for words that differ in only one consonant or vowel sound, but have different spellings and meanings: bat, cat, fat, hat, etc. or ban, Ben, bin, bun.
<p>English alphabetics rules do not work all of the time. The exceptions are confusing for students.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The rules for English alphabetics work 80-85% of the time! Exceptions often have root in other languages such as Latin or Greek. We have a rich and complex language!

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Select words carefully for alphabetics instruction; in other words, control the difficulty and exceptionality.
What strategies work for answering questions about exceptions?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Study the words beforehand so you are prepared to answer questions about exceptionalities. 2. If exceptionalities cause confusion or frustration, eliminate them at first and present later. 3. Talk about sound/syllable/prefix/suffix/root <u>patterns</u> rather than rules. Patterns repeat rather than rule.
It is hard to find text with taught patterns for alphabetics-in-context practice.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You do not have to look for or find text for each new pattern! Just use passages at students' fluency instructional levels to provide important alphabetics-in-context practice. 2. Have students search for words in familiar texts that demonstrate taught letter-sound-syllable-word patterns. 3. You can enter words into ReadWorks (https://www.readworks.org) passage searches and texts with the word (or other forms) will be found.
How do I prevent alphabetics lessons from becoming vocabulary lessons?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you are teaching patterns in one-syllable words, tell students they will first practice reading or blending the words. Then you will tell meanings or give examples for those they do not know. 2. If you are teaching patterns in multi-syllable words, this requires knowing word parts and their meanings, which naturally becomes a combined alphabetics and vocabulary lesson. 3. For both levels of alphabetics, provide simple meanings with just 1-2 examples of usage. Keep the focus on accurate and automatic word reading.
How do I deal with students' irregular class attendance and the eternal problem of catch-up?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Always begin with a short visual and/or auditory drill of taught or troublesome letter-sound-syllable-word patterns. 2. Teach a different pattern each week or month. New alphabetics students can then join frequently and move forward with you. 3. Teach stand-alone lessons for high-frequency phonograms (see <i>Teaching Analogy Phonics</i>), common morphemes (see <i>Morpheme Matrices</i>), or common syllables (see <i>102 Most Common Non-Word Syllables</i>). All three are available at http://atlasabe.org/resources/ebri/ebri-alphabetics