Alphabetics Instruction for STAR/EBRI Volunteers

By Marn Frank, ATLAS Literacy & STAR Coordinator and Rob Podlasek, MLC Senior Training Manager

This handout describes what STAR/EBRI volunteers "need to know" about evidence-based and explicit alphabetics instruction. It also provides a routine for teaching English letter-sound-syllable patterns that will help students read, recognize, and spell words more accurately.

What is alphabetics? Alphabetics is an umbrella term for the reading foundational skills that help all readers "get print off the page." These skills include: (1) following print from left to right, top to bottom, and page to page, (2) naming and writing all upper and lower case Roman alphabet letters, (3) knowing all single consonant and short vowel sounds, (4) segmenting spoken and written words into sounds or syllables, (5) blending sounds or syllables into spoken and written words, (6) knowing all consonant blend, ending, and digraph patterns, (7) knowing all long vowel-silent e and vowel team patterns, (8) knowing irregularly spelled patterns, (9) knowing syllable, prefix, and suffix patterns, and (10) knowing a variety of roots, their meanings, and word families.

Who are your alphabetics students? Your alphabetics students are native or non-native English speakers who need to improve their reading and spelling of short and longer words. New English speakers may need to learn skills 1-2 (print concepts). Beginning-level readers likely need to learn or expand skills 3-8 (phonological awareness and phonics). Intermediate-Advanced level readers are likely ready to learn skills 9-10 (multi-syllable decoding); although, some may need to expand skills 7-8.

What is your volunteer role for explanation? When you meet new alphabetics students, briefly explain the value and process of instruction. For some native English speakers, this is especially important because they have been struggling with alphabetics for years. Example: "Good readers need to know how to sound out words correctly and quickly. If we cannot read the words on a page, we easily lose meaning and interest. Together, we will learn English letter-sound-syllable patterns that help with reading and spelling words. We will also practice writing and reading the words in sentences."

What is your volunteer role for a modeling, guiding, and application routine?
NOTE: The STAR/EBRI teacher will tell you which alphabetics skills to teach. The following routine is intended for teaching skills 3-10. Each lesson can be short (15-30 minutes), and the entire routine will take multiple days, repeated over weeks and months. The following directions describe how to drill taught skills and teach new skills using a multisensory process of seeing, hearing, saying, reading, spelling, and writing.

Visual/Auditory Drill: Select a small set of taught letters, sounds, or words to review from the board or on paper. Have students tell letter names and sounds or read the words. Then dictate the sounds or words for spelling on paper or white boards, in the air, or with small flashcards. V/A drills are short (3-5 minutes) and regular (at least once a week).

Skill 3: Letter-Sound Modeling: Teach 3-5 new letter-sound patterns at the board, on paper, or with flashcards. Name each letter, say its clipped sound (do not add 'uh'), and repeat as necessary. A recommended sequence for teaching the 21 single consonants and 5 short vowel letters is: **m, l, s, t, ă, p, f, c, n, b, r, j, k, ĭ, v, g, w, d, h, ŭ, y, z, x, ŏ, ĕ, qu**.

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Skills 3-4: Letter-Sound Guiding: Have students see and say the 3-5 <u>new</u> letter-sound patterns several times and provide correction. Guide them in hearing the sounds in familiar objects or actions: "What do you hear at the beginning of map? light? sit? talk?" "What do you hear at the end of jam? bill? toss? cut?" When they are ready, dictate the sounds for spelling on paper or white boards, in the air, or with small flashcards.

Skills 3-5: Letter-Sound Application: Have students find words with <u>new</u> patterns in familiar sentences or stories. If they are capable, guide them in blending 2-3 <u>taught and new</u> patterns into word families: am, Sam, Pam, mat, sat, pat, fat, cat, bat, map, lap, sap, tap, cap, nap, man, tan, pan, fan, can, ban, etc. As needed, give simple definitions or examples; however, do not let this become a vocabulary lesson! Have them reread the words in pairs or independently.

Skills 3-7: Word Modeling: Teach 10-15 <u>new</u> words of 4-6 letters at the board, on paper, or with flashcards. Model segmenting of sounds, blending into words, and repeat as necessary. A recommended sequence for teaching consonant and vowel combinations is: **s blends, long vowel-silent e, consonant endings and digraphs, consonant l and r blends, consonant clusters, vowel digraphs (long sounds), r and l controlled, less common consonant and s blends, vowel diphthongs (glided sounds), and irregular consonants and vowels.**

Skills 3-7: Word Guiding: Have students segment and blend the 10-15 <u>new</u> words several times and provide correction. As needed, give simple definitions or examples; however, do not let this become a vocabulary lesson! When they are ready, dictate the words for spelling on paper or white boards, in the air, or with small flashcards.

Skills 6-8: Word Application: Model reading sentences from the board that use <u>taught, new, and sight or high frequency</u> words. Guide students in rereading them aloud. If they are capable, support their expansion or creation of new sentences. Model and guide oral readings of the new sentences. Have them reread the new sentences in pairs or independently.

Skills 9-10: Multi-syllable Decoding: Most of the directions above for modeling, guiding, and application can be used to teach multi-syllable decoding. The recommended sequence is: **compound words; 6 syllable types and 5 syllabication rules; consonant and vowel suffixes; prefixes; Latin roots, Greek forms, their meanings and word families**. An interesting fact: If alphabetics time is limited or student attendance is irregular, just teaching open and closed syllables will support 75% of prefix and suffix decoding!

Need or want to learn more?
- ✓ If you have questions about alphabetics instruction, the #1 person to ask is the STAR/EBRI teacher!
- ✓ You can also check out volunteer trainings and resources from the Minnesota Literacy Council at http://mnliteracy.org.
- ✓ Check out ATLAS's STAR/EBRI website at http://atlasabe.org/resources/ebri/ebri-alphabetics Look for these FREE resources to view and print: *Beginning Alphabetics Tests and Tools, Teaching Analogy Phonics, Intermediate Word Study, Making Sense of Decoding and Spelling, and Morpheme Matrices.*