FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS IN ReadyGEN

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How do we prepare our children for a successful future? How do we assure them access to post-secondary opportunities? A big part of their success will depend on providing them opportunities to read, write, and build deep knowledge and understandings through text. These are fundamental principles of ReadyGEN. With an eye on achieving these valuable outcomes, the authors of ReadyGEN realize that a firm grounding in the foundational skills of reading serves as the essential building block for ensuring that these goals are met. This requires a well-defined and rigorous focus on such important components of the foundational skills as Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, High-Frequency Words, and Decoding. These foundational skills serve as the building blocks for focusing on building knowledge through rich and rigorous texts rather than solely through isolated skills instruction.

ReadyGEN provides students with the skills, strategies, and practices to efficiently read words so that they can understand and construct meaning from text for the purpose of enjoyment, learning, communicating, or obtaining necessary information, whether reading a book, magazine, e-mail message, or information on the Web.

How can students acquire the proficiency they need to understand and learn from text? First they must acquire the skills and processes to decode and read words accurately and automatically. As students become proficient readers, they are able to recognize most words with little effort and use their cognitive processes to think about text and make connections with what they know. Youngsters who do not have these automatic foundational skills are laborious readers who use much of their cognitive processing to figure out words and have little left to do the challenging work of reading deeply. For this reason, ReadyGEN provides a comprehensive scope and sequence so that teachers have the instructional supports they need to ensure that every student has the reading foundational skills necessary for success in the early grades and beyond.

The next sections of this paper describe the method for teaching the foundational skills in reading that are essential for meeting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as well as other progressive state standards. You will note that the foundational skills for the primary grades are extremely rigorous and fast paced, providing students with enough opportunities to practice to ensure successful text reading. Students are exposed to multiple text types to practice their foundational skills, including opportunities to "say and spell," decodable practice readers, and trade books.

Phonemic Awareness

Students use their knowledge of sounds in a word to map these sounds to print and read. Phonemic awareness is knowing and demonstrating that spoken language can be broken down into smaller units (words, syllables, phonemes), which can be manipulated within an alphabetic system or orthography. Phonological awareness includes the skills of rhyming, alliteration, blending, segmenting, and manipulating—all of which are systematically taught through ReadyGEN.

- **Rhyming:** identifying similarities and differences in word endings
- **Alliteration:** identifying similarities and differences in word beginnings
- **Blending:** putting syllables or sounds together to form words
- **Segmenting:** dividing words into syllables and sounds
- **Manipulating:** deleting, adding, and substituting syllables and sounds

Of all of the phonemic awareness skills, blending phonemes (e.g., "Say these sounds to make a word: /r/u/g/"), segmenting phonemes (e.g., "How many sounds are in the word *cap?* Say each sound separately"), and manipulating phonemes (e.g., "Say *man* without the /m/ sound") are the ones that are most related to success in learning to read and thus the ones that are the primary focus of ReadyGEN. Phonemic awareness activities can be among the most fun activities, engaging kindergarten and first-grade students in silly games with words (e.g., "Say *frog* without the /f/ sound: 'rog'"). Teachers can use manipulatives (e.g., chips) with students to represent sounds and use movement to make auditory/oral tasks more visible (e.g., students can represent sounds and move around to build words).

Phonics

In ReadyGEN, while students are gaining proficiency in distinguishing the sounds in words and in segmenting and blending them orally (phonemic awareness), they are also learning to apply their knowledge to making connections between sounds and print. This association between the sounds of language and print is essential to acquiring the **alphabetic principle** (understanding that the sequence of letters in written words represents the sequence of sounds in spoken words). ReadyGEN uses a progressive and solid research-based approach to instruction that starts in the beginning of kindergarten and teaches both phonemic awareness and phonics. Using a refined set of frequently used consonants and short vowels, ReadyGEN launches students on applying phonics rules to reading words and soon books. Students are reading in early kindergarten! ReadyGEN also has available a set of decodable books in which the words are composed of letter-sound correspondences that students have been previously taught so that they can readily apply their phonics knowledge to reading books.

ReadyGEN integrates research knowledge about phonics instruction (e.g., Ehri, 2004), resulting in significant benefits in decoding and spelling for students. How does ReadyGEN teach phonics?

- Students are explicitly taught to convert letters into sounds and then blend the sounds to form recognizable words.
- Students write and spell new words, applying their phonics knowledge.
- Students practice the phonics patterns and learn only the necessary rules to access the maximum word reading knowledge.
- Teachers can be flexible in their phonics instruction to adapt to the needs of individual learners.
- Students learn to use their phonics knowledge to read one-syllable and multisyllabic words.
- Teachers have enough phonics instruction to help students read words but not too much time to detract from opportunities to read text.

High-Frequency Words

Reading words quickly and easily is a necessary key to successful reading. However, English has a high number of high-frequency words that are not readily decodable. Therefore, it is important that students develop a sight-word vocabulary of high-frequency words (i.e., the words that they recognize without conscious effort).

A **high-frequency word** is a word that the student can recognize automatically. When reading words by sight, the words are processed quickly and accessed from memory. What are some of the **high-frequency words** that students can learn? Consider words such as *the, you, of, from,* and *was,* which appear so often in text. Isn't it interesting that the words *the, of, and, a, to, in, is, you, that,* and *it* account for more than 20 percent of the words that students will encounter? For this reason, ReadyGEN teaches these words as sight words so students can use their decoding skills to access increasingly challenging texts. According to Fry, Kress, and Fountoukidis (2003), about 50 percent of written language is represented through 100 high-frequency words that ReadyGEN teaches explicitly. Consider the following guidelines for teaching high-frequency words (Vaughn and Bos, 2012).

Guidelines for Teaching High-Frequency Words

- Teach words that occur most frequently in text.
- Ensure that students understand the meaning of the high-frequency words that are taught.
- Introduce these new words before students encounter them in text.
- Limit the number of words introduced in a single lesson.
- Add a written component such as tracing, copying, and writing from memory.
- When students confuse visually similar words (e.g., *what* for *when),* highlight the differences.
- Provide multiple opportunities, including games and computer-assisted instruction, for the students to read the words in text and as single words.
- Review words that have been previously taught, particularly if the students miscall them when reading text.

Decoding

What is decoding? Decoding requires students to use what they know about how sounds map to letters to build words. When students are approaching a word in text for the first time (e.g., *bullet),* they can use what they know about the sounds to blend them to make a word they know.

What word-reading strategies do readers employ to decode words they do not know automatically?

Phonic Analysis: Identify and blend letter-sound correspondences into words.

Onset-Rime: Use common spelling patterns (onset-rimes) to decode words by blending the initial sound(s) with the spelling pattern or by using analogy.

Structural Analysis and Syllabication: Use knowledge of word structures such as compound words, root words, suffixes, prefixes, and inflectional endings and syllable types to decode multisyllabic words and assist with meaning.

Syntax and Semantics: Use knowledge of word order (syntax) and context (semantics) to support the pronunciation of words and confirm their meanings.

ReadyGEN teaches students to understand word structures such as compound words, root words, suffixes, prefixes, and inflectional endings and syllabication to decode and/or glean the meaning of multisyllabic words. Learning about word structures may be referred to as structural analysis. Between third and seventh grades, children learn from 3,000 to 26,000 words, most of them multisyllabic words encountered through reading. It helps students read new words when they understand that they may be able to identify smaller units or words they know within a larger word (e.g., *Manhattan* has "man" and "hat" in it). Root words, prefixes, suffixes, and inflectional endings also help students read and understand words. For example, the word *unhappy* can be segmented into two parts: *un-happy.* Chunking not only makes this word easier to decode, but it also tells readers about the meaning. In the case of unhappy, *un-* means "not," and most youngsters will know the meaning of *happy.*

Guidelines for Teaching and Reinforcing Structural Analysis

- Teach the meanings along with recognition of the meaning parts.
- Explain and demonstrate how many "big words" are just "smaller words" with prefixes, suffixes, and endings.
- Ask students to decode words they do not know by covering all but one part of the word and having them identify it, and then uncovering the next part and identifying it, and so on.
- Use a word map to demonstrate how one base word can make a cadre of related words.

Dividing words by common syllable types helps readers with decoding multisyllabic words. A high percentage of more than 600,000 English words can be categorized as one of six syllable types or a combination of different syllable types (Carreker, 1999; Knight-McKenna, 2008). What are some of the significant syllable types?

Six Types of Syllables

Type	Description/Examples
Closed (CVC)	Ends in at least one consonant; vowel is short; e.g., *met, lip, fan*
Open (CV)	Ends in one vowel; vowel is long; e.g., *see, ta-* in *table*
Vowel-consonant-e (CVCe)	Ends in one long vowel, one consonant, and a final *e* that is silent; e.g., *safe, pile, rope, tube*
Vowel team (CVVC)	Uses two adjacent vowels; e.g., *pain, seal, loan*
R-controlled (CV+r)	Vowel is followed by /r/, and vowel pronunciation is affected by /r/; e.g., *corn, turn, barn*
Consonant-le (-C+le)	Unaccented final syllable with a consonant plus /l/ and silent *e;* e.g., *riddle, paddle*

ReadyGEN provides opportunities for teachers to maximize students' reading success by ensuring that they have all of the foundational skills necessary. The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) outlines the grade-level expectations for teaching the foundational skills of reading. The early foundational skills recommended by the CCSS are the same as those taught by ReadyGEN and describe familiar areas of instruction included in state standards (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, high-frequency words, and decoding) that are part of learning to read and write in English. The foundational skills in ReadyGEN will help you ensure that the next **GEN**eration of readers is truly **Ready** to read, write, and understand text in meaningful ways, accessing deeper learning and opportunities for a bright future.

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