



Reading Recovery®

# Phonemic awareness and phonics in Reading Recovery

It is not uncommon for beginning readers to exhibit challenges in the areas of phonemic awareness and/or phonics. Reading Recovery, based on Dr. Marie Clay's literacy processing theory, incorporates teaching phonemic and orthographic relationships in every individually designed daily lesson.

**Phonemic awareness is defined as the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words. Phonics instruction teaches children the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language.**

Phonemic awareness and phonics are explicitly taught throughout each daily Reading Recovery lesson within the context of reading and writing continuous, authentic text and only in isolation when necessary. In addition, the writing part of the lesson and initial and ongoing assessments used in Reading Recovery devote special attention to these two critical components of reading instruction.

Phonics and phonemic awareness support the decoding component of the reading and writing processes. While it is necessary to value decoding skills as an important piece of literacy learning, it is equally important to understand that the terms *decoding* and *reading* are not synonymous. Decoding in isolation leaves out the critical component of comprehending the meaning in text.

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Reading Recovery does not follow a pre-packaged, scripted, one-size-fits-all approach to literacy learning. Instead, as with all components of the Reading Recovery lesson, phonemic awareness and phonics instruction are systematic in nature and based on close observation by the skilled teacher and the strengths and needs of the child.

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## Standardized assessment and individualized daily lessons

*An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2016) provides a standardized, systematic way of capturing early reading and writing behaviors and is the primary assessment tool used in Reading Recovery. It has been awarded the highest possible ratings as an evidence-based screening tool to identify children at risk for literacy failure (National Center on Intensive Intervention, 2019). **The six tasks of the Observation Survey measure phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, and word recognition in reading and writing.** Daily running records and lesson records inform daily teaching.

**ASSESSMENT:  
OBSERVATION SURVEY**

**How Reading  
Recovery-trained  
teachers assess  
phonemic  
awareness and  
phonics**

**Phoneme Knowledge**

- Hearing phonemes in words as they learn to say words slowly
- Representing phonemes with letters in writing
- Connecting phonemes to letters

**Letter Knowledge**

- Corpus of knowledge around letter name, sound, and words that start with that letter for both upper and lower case letters

**Phonics Knowledge**

- Locating words within text after hearing sounds
- Using letter-sound knowledge and word patterns to read and write words
- Using letter-sound knowledge while reading and writing continuous texts

**INSTRUCTION:  
DAILY LESSONS**

**How Reading  
Recovery-trained  
teachers instruct  
for phonemic  
awareness and  
phonics so children  
can learn how  
words work in the  
English language**

- Learning quick and flexible recognition of letters, how to manipulate known words to make new words with magnetic letters
- Making new words by adding, deleting, and substituting phonemes with magnetic letters
- Working with letters and related sounds in a variety of ways (e.g., personalized alphabet books, letter sorting, working with letter sequences during word work, reading, and writing)
- Using phonological and orthographic information to independently monitor and decode unfamiliar words while reading aloud
- Linking known sounds, letters, and orthographic knowledge as children read and write
- Exploring spelling patterns and attending to visual features of words while gaining flexibility in problem solving as children read and write
- Hearing and recording sounds in words and noticing sequences of sounds and visual patterns (Children are taught to represent the sounds with letters or letter clusters, moving from sound analysis and later with sound and orthographic analysis.)
- Thinking about linking sounds and letters and word parts to make sense and look right while re-assembling a cut-up sentence

**Phonemic awareness and phonics are important components of learning to read. If you have further questions or would like to see how these components are taught, contact your Reading Recovery teacher or teacher leader.**

**Resources**

Clay, M. M. (2016). *An observation survey of early literacy achievement* (3rd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Clay, M. M. (2016). *Literacy lessons designed for individuals* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

National Center on Intensive Intervention (2019). <https://charts.intensiveintervention.org/chart/academic-screening/observation-survey-early-literacy-achievement#title>

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