

# In·tro·duc·tion

Figuring out why struggling secondary readers can't master the reading process can be a teacher's biggest challenge. Frequently, these students cannot comprehend the meaning of the words they read. But sometimes they just can't read.

Students who fall into the second group can read some sight words, but when they come across a new word they cannot figure it out. They simply don't "get" letter patterns. They haven't internalized the six basic types of English syllables (Rippel, 2008), and without that skill they are unable to decode new words. Their reading is not fluent—it's labored and unsatisfying. Their oral reading performance in class embarrasses them, and to avoid the feeling of failure, they stop participating in class and avoid reading at home (Torgensen, 2004).

Consequently, these students do not have much experience with reading, and their exposure to new vocabulary words, text organization, and academic language is limited (Moats, 2001). Without practice in reading, their comprehension, spelling, and writing skills decline dramatically over time. What may have begun as a fairly simple phonological or word-recognition deficit often becomes a debilitating language and comprehension problem that affects both spoken and written language (National Institute for Literacy, 2007).

Of course, these students should have mastered these basic reading skills a long time ago, so we teachers sometimes forget to check to make sure that they really know *how* to read. Or we may not think it's really our job to teach older students how to read. We hope, unfortunately too often in vain, that they will "get" it at some point on their own. And what secondary teacher has the time or patience to go back and teach those phonemic drills from early reading days?

Drills don't work well with secondary students anyway. But games and activities do. Instead of syllable pattern drills, *Teaching Syllable Patterns* organizes the six basic English syllable patterns into games and activities that can be easily inserted into any teacher's day.

Playing games and doing different activities helps move these skills to the automatic level so that students can pronounce the words they see more quickly. This will enable them to read the passages smoothly and hold onto their meaning. By taking the decoding to an automatic level, students can focus their attention on making meaning from the text.

Students learn the patterns effortlessly and with pleasure. And we have personally seen how quickly the patterns are internalized, providing a true shortcut to improved fluency.

## Who Can Use This Book?

*Teaching Syllable Patterns* is flexible and can be used with intensive reading classes, regular reading classes, or language arts classes at intermediate, middle-school, or high-school levels. Teachers, reading coaches, and tutors can set up the games and activities for whole- or small-group settings to provide intensive work on specific skills, or to tutor one-on-one. It can also be used in home-school settings.

This book lends itself to easily differentiating instruction in any classroom where literacy is the goal. When other students in class are working or reading independently, the games and activities can be used with small groups or individuals who are experiencing difficulty decoding words.

As teachers we modify content and address various learning styles to meet student needs. *Teaching Syllable Patterns* incorporates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning modalities. Older students who are still experiencing difficulty in decoding are going to need many opportunities to practice these skills using a variety of methods and learning styles. The easy-to-do games give them that practice.

## First Step: Identify the Reading Problem

An informal assessment is the first step in helping your striving students experience success in reading. Listen to your students' oral responses: Do they appear to comprehend meaning when you read to them? Listen to them read: Do they struggle with unknown words? Or do you find that they struggle to read words that are in their spoken vocabulary?

When assessing striving students, it's appropriate to keep a running record or use more formal assessments such as the Woodcock Reading Mastery (Woodcock, 1987) or the Diagnostics Assessment of Reading (Roswell et al, 2005). Group-administered, standardized tests alone will probably not provide enough information, but these tests can be used as a springboard for identifying those students with reading difficulties. Once students are identified as needing reading intervention, use informal assessments to determine the root of the problem.

## How to Use This Book

The chapters in *Teaching Syllable Patterns* are intended to be taught in the order they are presented. An organizational chart in Chapter 1 helps illustrate the instructional breakdown of the lessons. The chart indicates the average time for each chapter, but you are, of course, the best judge of how much practice your students need. Different sections can be combined or omitted depending on your students' progress and your classroom-specific needs.

Allow at least a week for each chapter (but you will see that some chapters have two or three weeks' worth of activities). This amount of time gives students enough practice with the newly introduced skills so that each set of skills becomes automatic before you move on to another. The chart in Chapter 1 gives recommended time frames for each lesson or activity.

Each chapter contains weekly "do-nows," which should be used as informal diagnostic tools to help determine which students need additional instruction before the mini-lesson or guided

practice with the whole group. The mini-lesson helps students understand the concepts presented in each chapter, and the guided practice enables the students to become proficient with the skills in a supportive environment.

Decoding instruction using these games and activities should not take up an entire lesson. Experience has shown us that students will master the decoding skills more quickly if they are taught in short, ten- to twenty-minute sessions with frequent review.

Because the goal is for students to internalize the patterns—to reach “automaticity”—an activity or game can be repeated as needed. The skills are reinforced through additional independent practice. As the teacher, you are the best judge of how much practice your students need to be successful. Choose the components your students need and skip those that are repetitive.

A post-test covering the skills taught ends each chapter. Nonsense words, also known as “pseudo-words,” are incorporated into these post-tests so that you eliminate the factor of sight vocabulary influencing student answers. The post-tests help you determine student progress and guide instruction. You can then decide whether to provide additional practice using the components of the unit or whether the skill has been mastered and students are ready to move on.

For student responses, we recommend the use of individual whiteboards, if at all possible. Students of all ages enjoy using these, and they are a great way to quickly assess students’ understanding of skills. Individual whiteboards are inexpensive and can be purchased in large sheets at major hardware stores, which will often cut them into customized, individual squares. Note that when classroom whiteboards are referenced in this book, an interactive whiteboard (such as a SMART™ Board) or overhead projector may be used instead. And, of course, using paper for responses is always an option.

The included CD saves on prep time by providing all of the reproducibles, assessments, and full-color game materials needed for every lesson. Game materials were designed to print clearly in color or black and white, and all game cards include a front and back so that they can be printed two-sided. Just look for the CD icon throughout the book.