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Sight Word Learning: What SLPs Need to Know

1. Reading researchers use the term “sight words” to refer to:
   A. Written words with irregular spellings
   B. Written words that are highly common
   C. Written words that are instantly, automatically recognized by the reader
   D. Small, function words

2. According to Ehri’s Phase Theory of Sight Word Reading, children in the partial alphabetic phase:
   A. Use some letter-sound correspondence, but do not secure full spellings in memory
   B. Have mastered letter-sound correspondence
   C. Can blend up to six phonemes
   D. Recognize blends and clusters as units

3. Children in the full alphabetic phase are not yet efficient readers because:
   A. They have low rapid automatic naming speed
   B. They lack cipher knowledge
   C. They rely on the beginning and ending sounds of words
   D. They are not yet using unitization

4. Words with irregular spellings:
   A. Are learned through visual memorization
   B. Are learned through orthographic mapping using a phonological framework, just like regular words
   C. Are learned through a different process than words with regular spellings
   D. Cannot be learned to automaticity by dyslexic children

5. In speech-to-print teaching of irregular words:
   A. The teacher will say the word before showing it in print
   B. The teacher will help the student identify phonological features of the word
   C. The teacher will connect the phonological features of the word to the conventional spelling
   D. All of the above
6. Teaching articulatory gestures together with phonemic awareness (PA) training:
   A. Has been shown to have a larger and longer lasting effect on young learners than PA and phonics instruction alone
   B. Has been shown to have the same outcomes as phonics instruction alone
   C. Is not done outside of articulation therapy
   D. Has not been shown to be effective in intervention studies

7. Orthographic mapping refers to:
   A. Learning letter-sound relationships
   B. The cognitive process of connecting letters in a written word to the phonological representation of the spoken word stored in long term memory
   C. The cognitive process of matching written words to meaning
   D. The pre-alphabetic phase

8. When teaching recognition of function words, which step of the suggested instructional approach is particularly relevant to struggling readers with DLD?
   A. Saying the word first
   B. Identifying the phonological features of the word
   C. Practicing usage of the target word in sentences
   D. Covering up the word and spelling it again.

9. When introducing a new target word in a lesson focused on orthographic mapping, the first step is to:
   A. Show the printed word
   B. Say the word and have the student(s) repeat it
   C. Have the students trace the word
   D. Segment the phonemes in the word

10. Why is it important to have students spell, not just read, words being targeted for automaticity?
    A. Spelling requires deeper orthographic knowledge than reading, so spelling practice benefits both spelling and reading
    B. Spelling is a phonological process
    C. Spelling involves articulatory gestures
    D. Spelling will be tested in the classroom
Sight Word Learning: What SLPs Need to Know

Jeanne Tighe, MA, CCC-SLP, CDP

Moderated by: Carolyn Smaka, AuD, Editor in Chief, continued

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Sight Word Learning: What SLPs Need to Know
Jeanne Tighe, MA, CCC-SLP, SLDI, BCS-CL
Disclosures

- No financial relationships relevant to the presentation.
- No nonfinancial relationships relevant to the presentation.

Learning Outcomes

After this course, participants will be able to:
- Explain how a word is stored in long term memory.
- Explain the differences between the print-to-speech instructional approach and the speech-to-print approach.
- Describe a sight word instructional technique based on the principle of orthographic mapping.
What is a sight word?

How Teachers Commonly View Sight Words

- Word commonly encountered in grade-level print (e.g. Dolce and Fry lists)

- Phonetically irregular word (permanently or temporarily)
How Reading Science Views Sight Words

- Any word that is instantly, automatically recognized in print
How a New Word in Print Becomes a Sight Word

Words have multiple identities.

ORTHOGRAPHIC
witch

SEMANTIC
(plus usage)

PHONOLOGICAL
/witʃ/

(Adapted from Seidenberg, 2017)
Ehri’s Phase Theory of Sight Word Reading

(Ehri, 2005)

Pre-Alphabetic Phase

Children read words by remembering associated visual or contextual cues.
Partial Alphabetic Phase

Children use the sound values of some letters to form connections between spellings and pronunciations to remember how to read words.

Full Alphabetic Phase

- Children use decoding skill and graphophonemic knowledge to read and spell all the way through a word.
- They bond spellings fully to their pronunciations in memory, but do not efficiently use other morphographemic information or units.
Consolidated Alphabetic Phase

The predominant types of connections for storing and recognizing words are morpho-graphemic.
The child is using unitization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>collect</th>
<th>intercept</th>
<th>adept</th>
<th>possess</th>
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</thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion</td>
<td>temptation</td>
<td>magician</td>
<td>prediction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Orthographic Mapping

- The phonemes of the spoken word act like mental anchors onto which the letters of the printed word are attached.
- This is relatively easy when the word has transparent orthography.
- Relatively more challenging when the word has opaque orthography.

(Kilpatrick, 2015 & 2016)
Same Process for Regular and Irregular Words

/s/ /t/ /o/ /p/ /th/ /r/ /oo/

stop

through

Why Sight Word Learning Can Be Hard
What the problem likely isn’t:

- Visual memory
- Basic lack of attention
- Lack of practice
- Absence of “multisensory” strategies such as sand writing, forming letters out of beans
- Hasn’t “clicked” yet

The Phonemic Component

- Phonological representations of target words are weak
  - Phonemic awareness (PA) training is vital but still often minimized.
  - PA training that includes explicit teaching of articulatory gestures has larger and longer lasting effects than auditory instruction alone (Sargiani et al, 2018).
- Stuck at the partial alphabetic phase.
The Linguistic Component

- It is easier to orthographically map to semantically concrete words than to function words. (Miles & Ehri, 2017)
- Mapping letters to other word identities (phonological, semantic, syntactic) is at risk when those identities are weak. (Dawson & Ricketts, 2017)

Targeted sight words are often particularly perilous for children with DLD

- Often function words, which the child may not have established in semantic/syntactic systems
- From the Fry list:
  - the, of, and, a, to, in, is, you, that, it, he, was, for, are, as
- From the Dolch 1 list:
  - again, any, by, could, has, how may, some, where, when
Not Unitizing

- Many children get stuck at the full alphabetic phase and never move to the consolidated phase.

- Unitization simplifies and speeds storage and recognition.

One Solution:
Speech to Print Instruction

(Adapted from Mies, Rubin, & Gonzales-Frey, 2017 and Kilpatrick, 2016)
Common Sight Word Instructional Practices

- Show the written word- say it- have students repeat and practice
- Sky writing and sand writing
- Rainbow writing / color in word outlines
- Write three times
- Waterfall writing
- Match the shape of the word
- Unscramble
- Put it on a word wall

The Speech to Print Way

- Core Principle: Start with the spoken word, then map on the letters.
- Harness the phonological framework and make the connection from speech to print explicit
- Make connections between orthographic, phonological, and semantic word identities
- Build cognitive habits that promote orthographic mapping of all words (not just the ones we directly teach)
Introducing a New Word in Print

- Start with oral language
- Say the word
- Have the student repeat the word
- Use the word in a spoken sentence
- Have your student use the word in a spoken sentence
  - Incorporating usage practice contributes to building semantic/syntactic word identities

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Introducing a New Word in Print

- Move to phonology

- Discuss the sound properties of the word
  - Syllables
  - Rime units
  - Phonemic segmentation
  - Articulatory reference if incorporated

- Draw underlines on your paper/boards as a placeholder for each sound
**Introducing a New Word in Print**

- **Bridge to print**
  - Ask the student to predict what letters we could use to spell these sounds.
  - Show the printed word.
  - Compare the conventional spelling to the student’s prediction and discuss the differences.

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**Introducing a New Word in Print**

- **Focus on Spelling**
  - Have the student write the conventional spelling on their paper/board so that the letters sit on the lines of the sound they represent or connect to
  - Repeat/review spelling orally and/or in print
  - Spelling requires deeper orthographic knowledge than reading, so word practice using spelling is more efficient than reading practice
Video Demonstration: Initial Word Presentation

Video Demonstration: Reviewing a Word
Application Issues

When You’re the Primary Interventionist

- Fits easily into existing structured phonics programs
- Phonics-based teaching of phonetically regular words already promotes mapping, but remember the value of unitization
- When choosing words to teach this way- consider their linguistic identity and whether they’re temporarily or permanently irregular
- Add these concepts and techniques to parent training
When You’re a Support Interventionist

- Classroom Teacher
- Letter-sound correspondence
- Phonics rules
- Traditional sight word practice
- Reading fluency practice
- Reading comprehension (story elements, text connections, strategies)
- SLP
- Speech sound remediation
- Phonemic awareness intervention
- Grammatical intervention
- Semantic intervention

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When You’re a Support Interventionist

- Select words from your goal areas and spend some therapeutic time connecting orthography to the phonological and semantic/syntactic identities you’re already creating

- Share these words and your work on them with the classroom teacher

- Collaboration with classroom teacher may help you identify overlap words (words already being targeted in class that overlap with your goals)
Sharing Knowledge

- Teachers responsible for literacy instruction with kids on our caseloads may not have accessed this knowledge base yet
- Major takeaways they need for our kids:
  - Draw attention to the sounds in the words even when they’re irregular
  - Make sure the child has lots of practice using the word so its identity is strong in their LTM
  - Increase spelling practice

Big Takeaways

- Learning sight words is not a visual process

- Written words are all learned and stored through the same phonologically and linguistically anchored processes

- Students with vulnerabilities in phonology and language content & structure skills need literacy instruction that targets these foundations
What questions do you have for me?

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