



Not sure which product you need?

How to Assess Your Student's Reading Level and Correct Problem Areas

This guide doesn't apply to students who haven't yet learned to read. In those cases, you already know you'll start at the very beginning. If you're working with First Step Phonics products, you would begin with the Level 0 workbooks. For anything else, read on.

This is only a guide. Without personally working with your student, I can't accurately evaluate their reading level. I can only relay what I have found to be successful.

To determine your student's weak points, you can test them on the various phonics steps listed on pages 1 - 4. For quick reference, see the flow chart on pages 5 - 8. How well your student does on those steps will determine the remedy. For example, if your student does fairly well on a step, any repairs would likely be minor. If your student has great difficulty in an area, then the solution would be more extensive.

Before I give you each testing step, let's go over the possible remedies — which will involve reading-related activities or phonics games, workbooks, and/or reading books. For example, if your student needs only a little work in an area, you can have them do some worksheets or other activities to gain certainty. Or maybe more practice reading is enough to solve the problem. In that case, you would get the appropriate-level reading books. But if that level requires a lot of work, then you could end up giving your student activities, games, and possibly all the workbooks and all the reading books for that level.

In summary, find their weaknesses, then work on those areas a little or a lot, as needed.

But how do you determine whether a student is weak in an area? My rule of thumb is that if they hesitate at all, we're going to work on it! I'll explain why I do that. Think of something your student knows really well, like their nose, their dog, a TV show, or their favorite food. They'll be able to tell you **EXACTLY** what that is, in great detail, with no hesitation. Because they know it that well. The word **KNOW** means to understand with certainty. With certainty, you don't have to stop and think

about it. And this is what you're aiming for at each step when teaching anyone to read. If your student moves on without full certainty, the next step will likely be more difficult than it should've been.

Here are the phonics steps to test:

Level 0

Check that your student can easily do the following:

- Say the alphabet in sequence
- Identify every uppercase letter
- Identify every lowercase letter
- Match uppercase to lowercase
- Write out all the letters, both upper- and lowercase, in alphabetical order

First Step Phonics Level 0, workbooks 1 through 3, address the above areas.

Next, you're going to make sure they know the sounds of the letters. If you're not sure what the exact sounds are, I have an entire video dedicated to that, which can be found on the Parent Resources tab.

For the vowels, only check the short sounds for *A*, *E*, *I*, *O*, and *U*. The other vowel sounds are higher levels, and remember, we're starting at the beginning.

Next, check the consonant sounds. At this level, we're only doing the hard sound for *C*, as in *CAT* or *CUB* and the hard sound for *G* as in *GET* or *GOB*. The other sounds for *C* and *G* are in higher levels, and we're not there yet.

First Step Phonics Level 0, workbooks 4 through 6, focus on letter sounds.

Level 1

Before we dive into this level...

I've found that when someone reads a book to a child and the child follows along, the child often ends up memorizing words. When you're checking this level, you want to make sure they actually know the individual letter sounds and they didn't just memorize the word because

they've seen it so many times. The reason for this is that if they know the sounds to each letter, they can usually sound out three-letter words they've never seen before. If they've only memorized the word and don't understand the individual sounds, the letters or combinations in different words will be meaningless to the student and they'll be unable to sound them out.

The way to ensure they know the sounds and how to blend multiple sounds together is to give them made-up words like ZAM or BOK. They've never seen these fake words and therefore couldn't have memorized them. You'll find out pretty quickly whether they really do know the sounds and how to blend three letters into a word.

When you give them the fake words, give them a variety of consonants and be sure to check all five short vowels.

If they can read your three-letter made-up words, move to Level 2. If they can't, you should have them work on it.

The First Step Phonics books and workbooks that focus on three-letter words are Level 1. Each workbook and each five-book set of stories is dedicated to one short vowel.

Level 2

This level involves consonant combinations — words with more than one consonant in a row, like DESK and STUMP. To test your student, you'll test the student the same way as you did Level 1. Give them made-up words like ZILP, FOST, NENT. If they do well with them, work up to more difficult combinations, such as SCRAST, THREMP, STRONCH.

There are five workbooks for this level and twenty-five early-reader books. The first five-book set and the first workbook start off with words like DUCK, MISS, WELL. They are words with four letters, but they still have only three sounds. That's a nice, easy bridge to four sounds in a word. The next twenty books and four workbooks in Level 2 gradually become more difficult.

Where you start in this level depends on how easy it is for the student to read the fake words. For instance, if they can read MUST or TENT well but trip up on STAMP, you may want to start with workbook three and/or set three of the books.

The First Step Phonics books and workbooks for this level are Level 2.

Level 3

The next step to check would be words with *E* at the end, which makes a long vowel sound, as in CUT to CUTE, CAP to CAPE, DOT to DOTE. Give them made-up words like BOPE, VUTE, HIBE, LAFE.

The First Step Phonics books and workbook for this level are Level 3.

Level 4

Level 4 focuses on other vowel-sound combinations. For instance, the *AI* in the word GAIN and TRAIL makes the long A sound. *OW* makes the long O sound as in ROW or GLOW. *OW* also makes the *OU* sound as in COW or BROWN. There are many other vowel combinations: *EE* as in SHEEP, *OU* as in HOUSE, *AY* as in SAY, *OE* as in TOE, *AU* as in HAUL, *AW* as in PAW, *EW* as in FEW, *UE* as in DUE. And much more. You should check every single one of these vowel blends and make sure your student knows them all. My teaching manual, *How to Teach Anyone to Read*, lists these vowel combinations and more, along with many words with those vowel blends. When testing your student, use these vowel combinations in made-up words.

The First Step Phonics books and workbooks to help with vowel blends are Level 4.

There are many other things to learn to become a great reader, but the above handles the bulk of it. To teach the higher levels, such as multisyllable words or silent letters, you can check out the teaching manual, *How to Teach Anyone to Read*.

I know the above is a lot to take in. If it were easy, more people would be teaching and so many parents wouldn't be dependent on schools, right? Just like your student needs practice getting good at something, so do teachers and parents. Try not to get frustrated and don't be too hard on yourself. Keep at it, and just like anything worthwhile, you will get better at teaching as you gain experience.

And that's it! If you have any questions, you can email us at info@FirstStepPhonics.com and one of us will do our best to answer you.

As always, be patient, be encouraging, be the teacher you wish you had!

Wishing you luck in creating a speedy, confident, and avid reader!

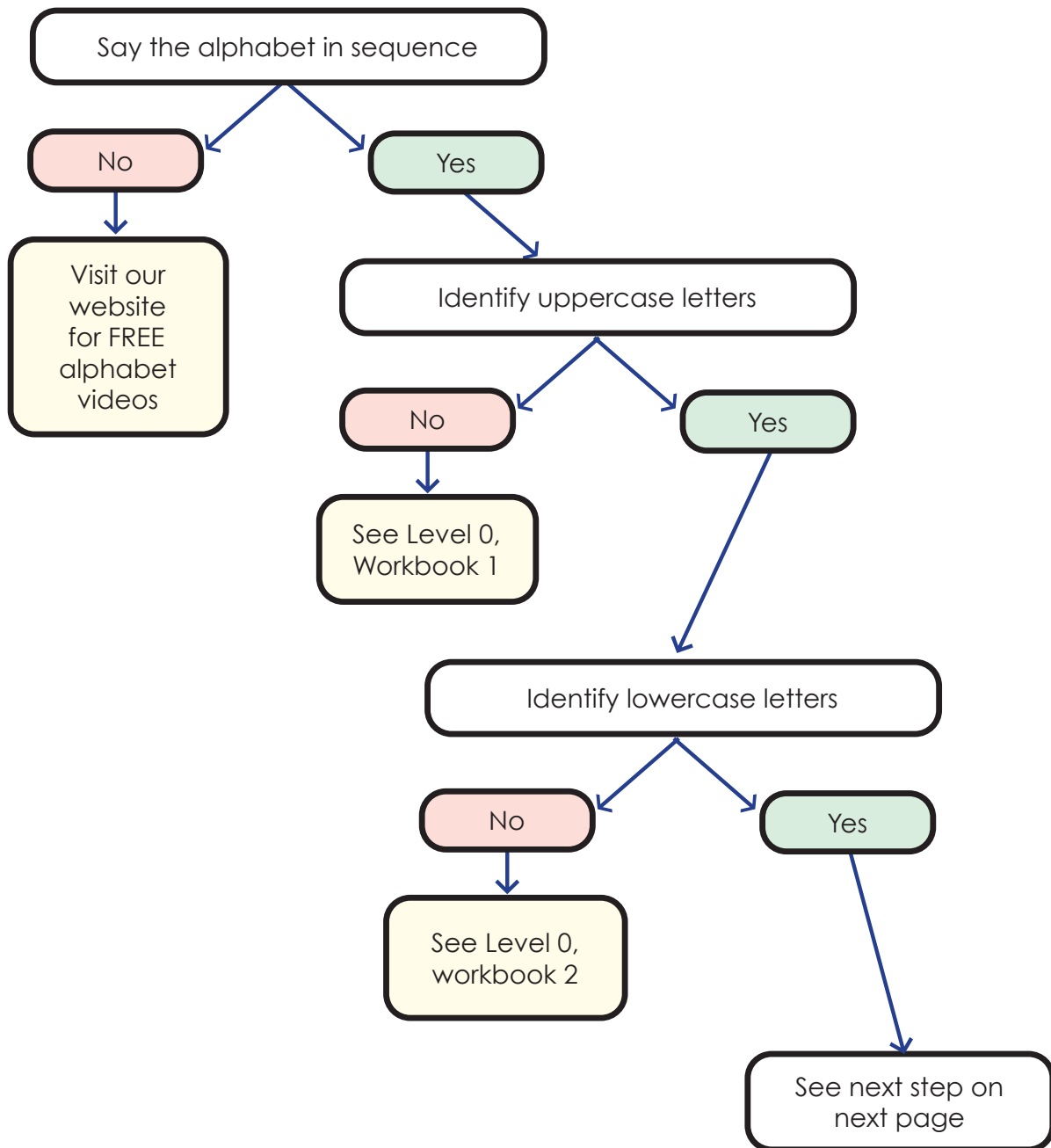
—Veronica Blade

** See next page for chart **



Which Product Does Your Student Need?

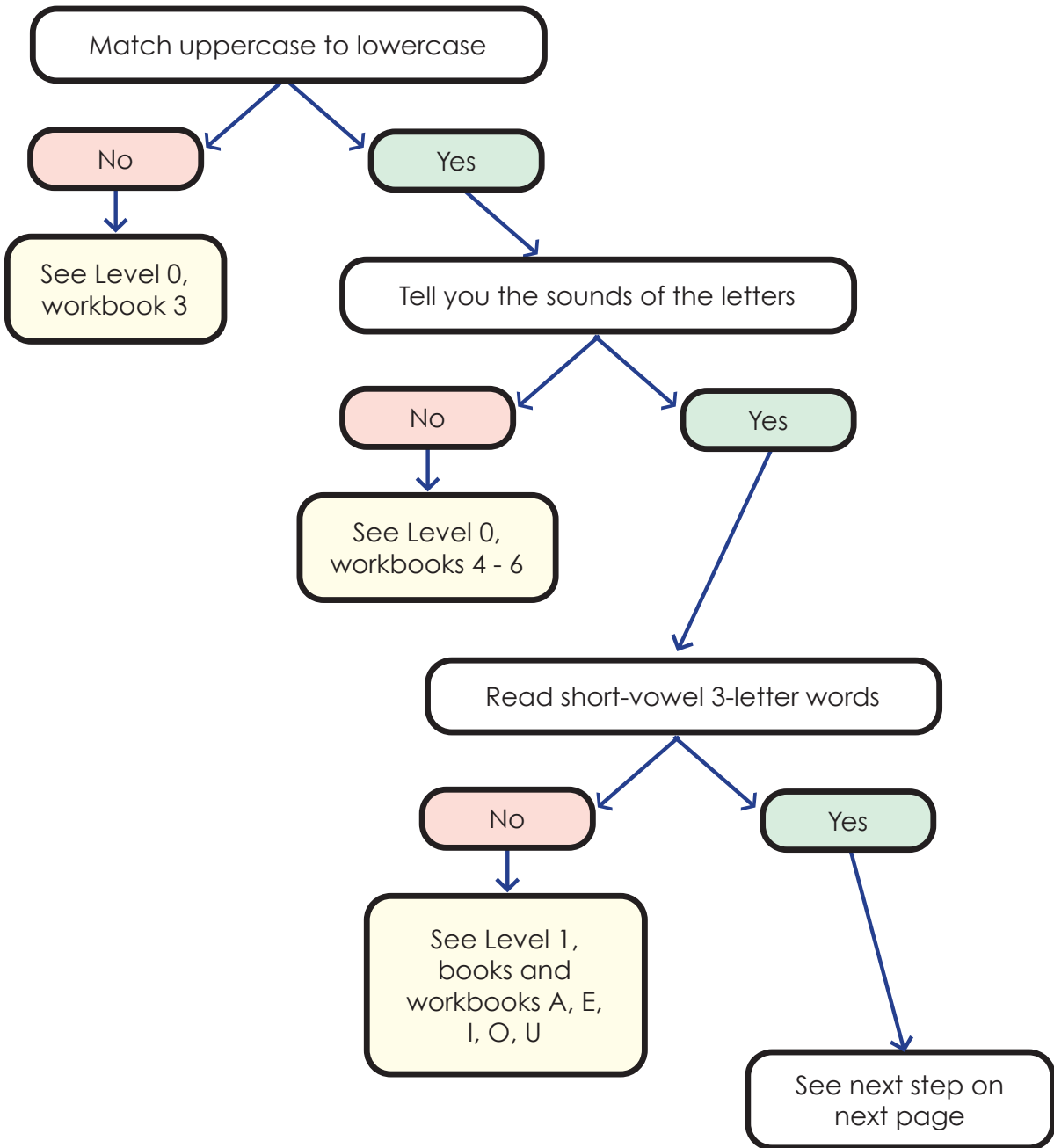
Check that your student can do each of the following:





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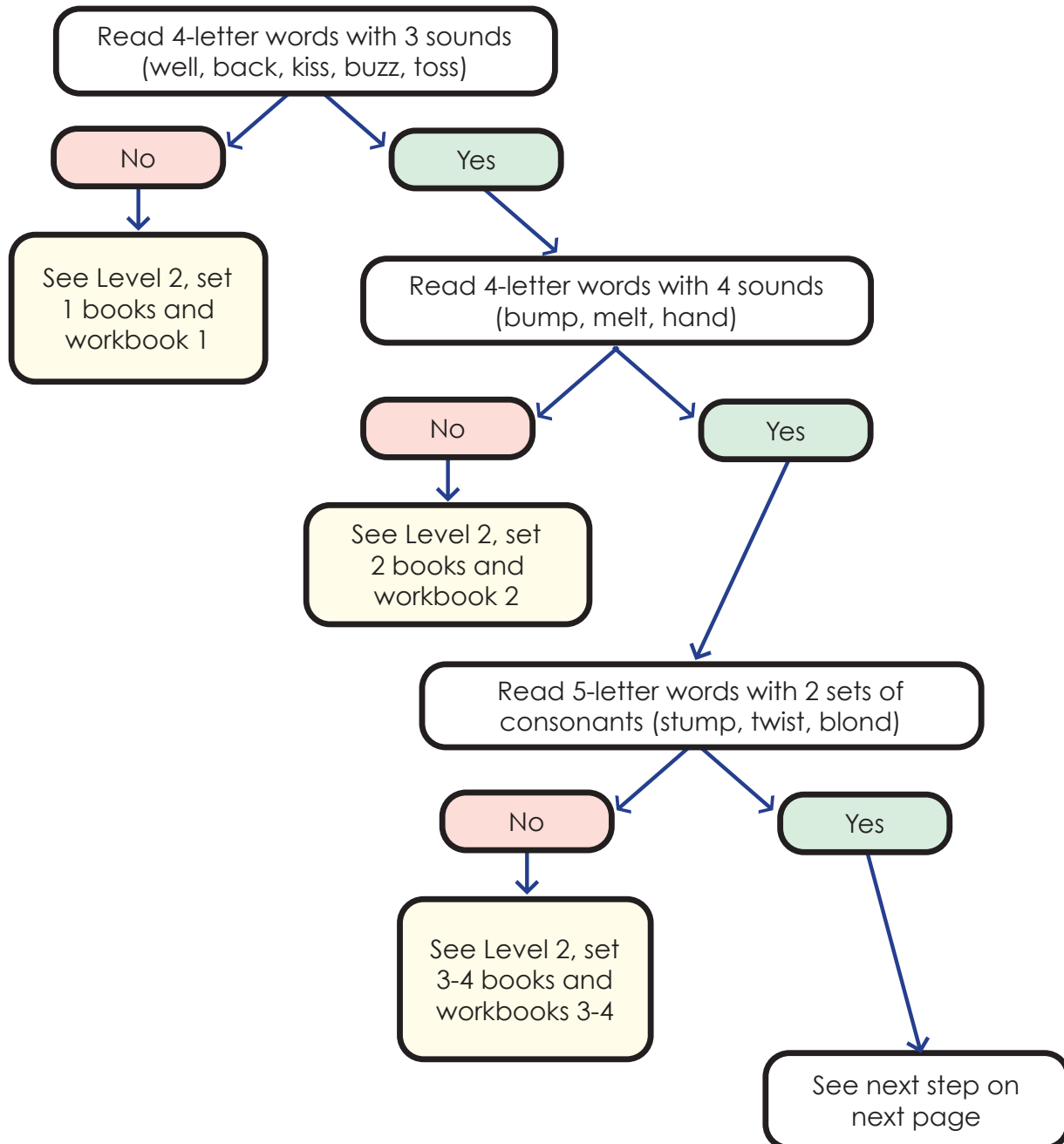
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