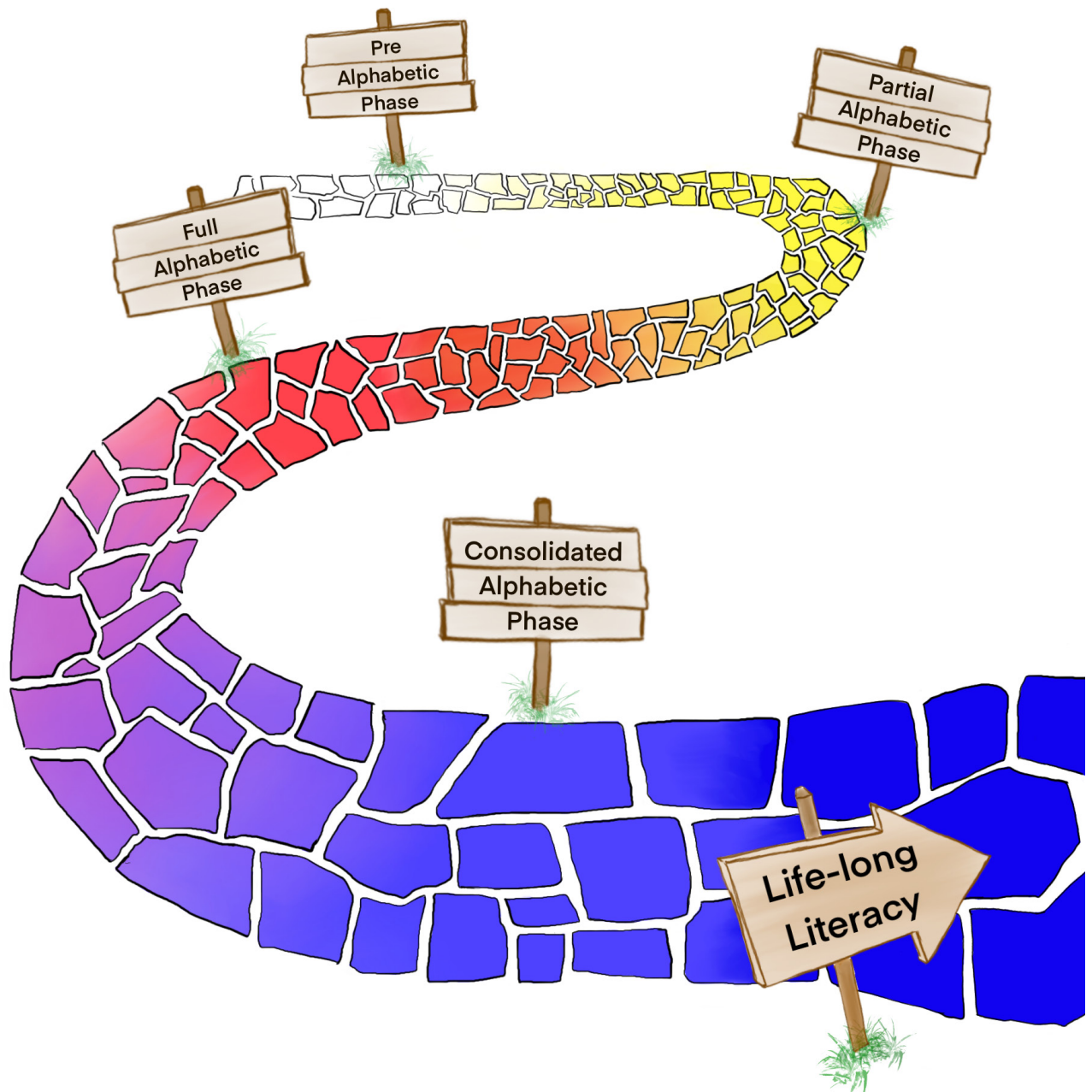


# Ehri's Phases of Sight Word Reading

Summary & Analysis from *Rooted in Language*



Based on research by Dr. Linnea Ehri  
Distinguished Professor Emerita, Educational Psychology

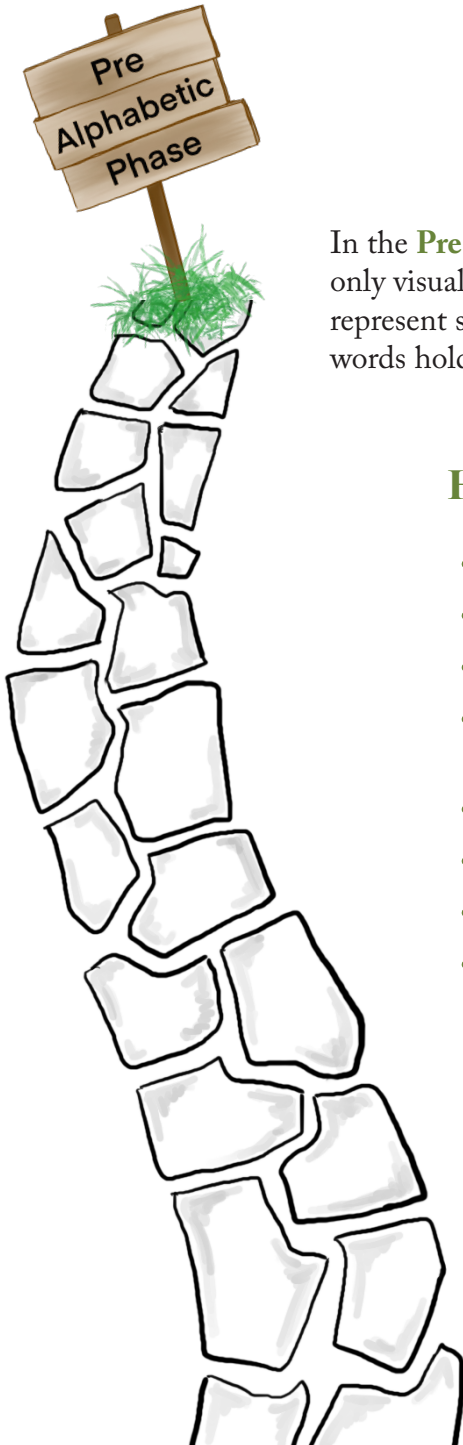
Images and content copyright of Rooted in Language, 2023

## What is a sight word?

A word that is read at rapid speed, so that it can be instantaneously recognized, pronounced, read, and understood. Proficient readers acquire thousands of sight words across their learning years.

Skilled readers connect visual information on the page with **phonology** (sound), **orthography** (spelling), **morphology** (word parts), **semantics** (vocabulary and meaning), and **syntax** (grammar).

Acquiring sight words and fluent reading is a complex journey that requires many literacy skills, including writing and spelling. The first stage of Dr. Ehri's theory begins with the Pre Alphabetic Phase.



In the **Pre Alphabetic Phase**, children recognize words using only visual or contextual cues. They do not understand that letters represent sounds, but they can begin to understand that written words hold meaning.

### Help children:

- Say and write the letters in their name
- Say the alphabet
- Understand that words convey meaning
- Make a game of collecting items that start with a certain sound
- Play with rhyme, especially in books
- Sing
- Recognize signs and words around them
- Understand someday they will read thousands of words

### Remember:

“Word guessing” is not the same as “word reading,” but it is part of the journey toward reading.

The **Transition to Partial Alphabetic Phase** starts once children are introduced to some letters and their sounds. Children are learning to use sound-to-letter connections to decode simple words, but their knowledge is limited. They may be able to read words by forming partial connections, but they will struggle to write them.

### Help children:

- Learn a handful of consonant and short vowel sounds, practicing the sound-to-letter connections
- Practice blending sounds with CV and VC nonwords (ex: ip, af, mu) and simple CVC words (ex: lip, set)
- Practice segmenting sounds for simple CVC words
- Understand that guessing is not reading
- Learn to use letter sounds to read words and not rely on context cues
- Practice saying the alphabet
- Say letter names while practicing letter formation
- Say letter sounds while spelling simple words

### Remember:

Children are in transition, which requires a lot of time and support.

Children should engage in writing and invented spelling to help them progress through these phrases.

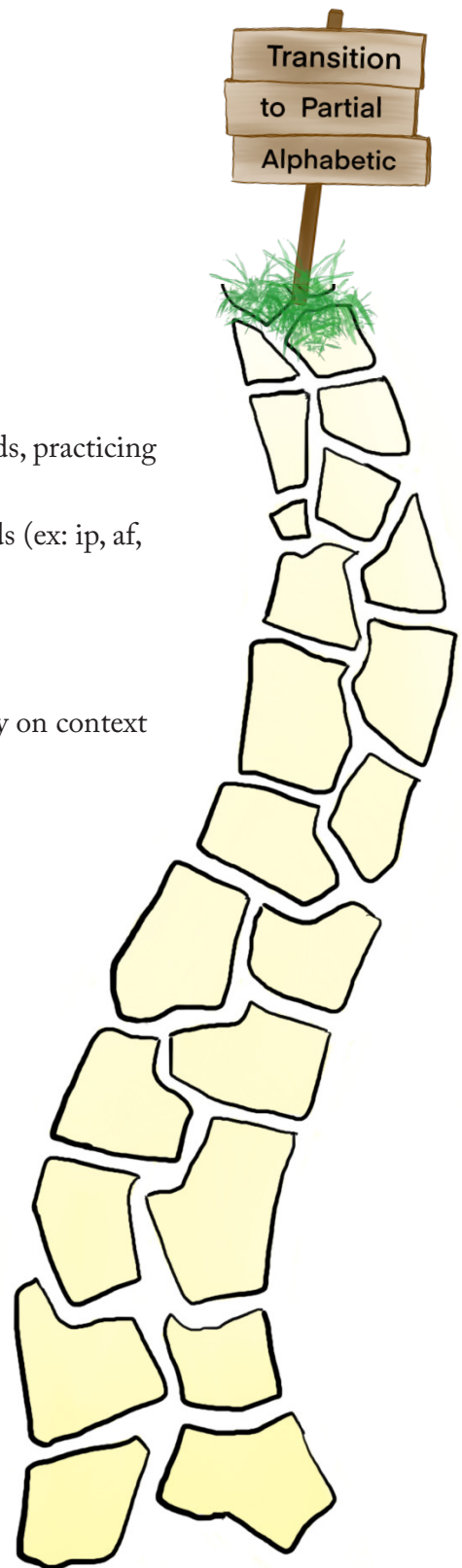
For many children, reading will progress more quickly than writing.

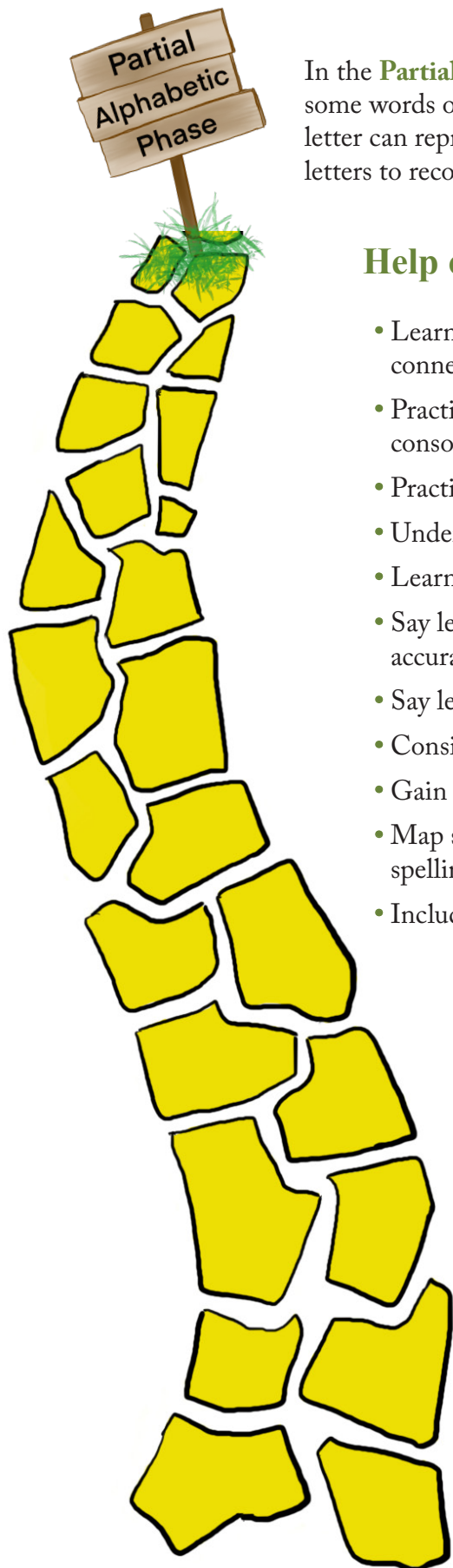
Practice means improvement, not perfection: mastering print can take at least 2 years and moving through these phases can take at least 3 years.

### Rooted in Language can help!

If your child is in this phase and you need support, check out these RiL materials and educator classes:

- Pinwheels Year 1
- Laying a Path: Phonics & Spelling





In the **Partial Alphabetic Phase**, students know most letter names and can read some words out of context. They understand that both a capital and lowercase letter can represent the same sound, but they primarily rely on initial and final letters to recognize words.

### Help children:

- Learn to recognize, read, and write the alphabet with sound-to-letter connections, short vowel sounds, and simple consonant teams
- Practice blending sounds with CVC words that contain single letters and consonant teams
- Practice blending sounds with simple blends in CCVC words
- Understand that guessing is not reading
- Learn to use sounds to decode words
- Say letter names while practicing letter formation and work on formation accuracy, speed, and comfort
- Say letter sounds when spelling and when using invented spelling
- Consistently engage in Intentional Copywork (and eventually Dictation)
- Gain skills in invented spelling and spelling knowledge for original writing
- Map sounds to letters consistently to support sight word recognition to grow spelling skills
- Include gentle editing as part of the writing process

### Remember:

Intentional Copywork & Dictation will become a more consistent part of a child's writing experience.

Prioritize original writing with invented spelling so the child gains comfort with holding the pencil and putting thoughts on paper.

Introduce basic syllables and common suffixes to expose children to reading across words.

### Rooted in Language can help!

If your child is in this phase and you need support, check out these RiL materials and educator classes:

- Pinwheels Year 1
- Laying a Path: Phonics & Spelling

When children **Transition from the Partial Alphabetic to Full Alphabetic Phase**, students continue to grow and practice their sound-to-letter knowledge, increasing their sight word reading. They are learning to read across sounds, solidifying not just the beginning and ending of words, but the middle, as well.

### Help children:

- Learn more advanced alphabetic code, practiced in reading, writing, and spelling
- Say sounds as they write
- Build a Vowel Chart for vowel sound and spelling organization
- Build an Affix Chart for common prefixes and suffixes
- Build a LA Binder
- Understand word parts by engaging in word study activities
- Practice breaking words into syllables by reading, pronouncing, and writing 2-3 syllable words
- Learn and practice spelling patterns, engaging in formal spelling activities

### Remember:

Students learn to consolidate their skills in Intentional Copywork, Dictation, and Editing.

Children should read out loud every day.

Continue to explicitly teach throughout the learning process, and do not shy away from explaining the value of an activity or skill.

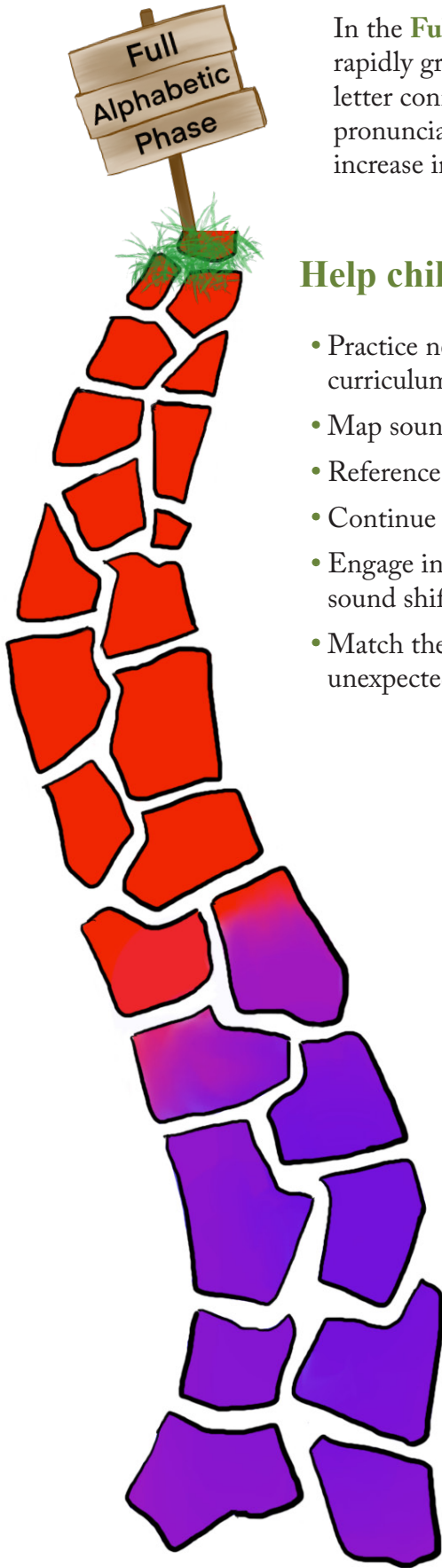
In original writing, students need encouragement to apply their sight word spelling and pattern knowledge, using invented spelling when needed.

### Rooted in Language can help!

If your child is in this phase and you need support, check out these RiL materials and educator classes:

- Pinwheels Year 2
- Wand
- Laying a Path: Phonics & Spelling
- Laying a Path: Word Study
- The Vowel Chart
- The LA Binder
- Roots Entwined





In the **Full Alphabetic Phase**, students are able to decode new words and rapidly grow their sight word vocabularies. Their full knowledge of sound-to-letter connections provides the mnemonic system needed to link spelling to pronunciation. Spelling is more fully secured in memory, which leads to a rapid increase in new sight word vocabulary.

### Help children:

- Practice new spelling patterns in reading, writing, and spelling across the curriculum
- Map sounds to letters as they learn and write new vocabulary
- Reference the Vowel Chart as they engage in spelling practice
- Continue building the Affix Chart with less common prefixes and suffixes
- Engage in reading and writing word level practice for multisyllable words, using sound shifting strategies
- Match the sounds they hear and say to the letters they read and write, noticing unexpected spellings

### Remember:

Students continue to consolidate their skills in Intentional Copywork, Dictation & Editing.

In original writing, students continually apply their sight word spelling and pattern knowledge, decreasing the need for invented spelling.

As students gain original writing skills, increase self-editing, including content expansion and organization.

Vocabulary and spelling practice includes analyzing the sounds in syllables and words, identifying word parts and grammatical structures, as well as understanding meaning.

### Rooted in Language can help!

If your child is in this phase and you need support, check out these RiL materials and educator classes:

- Grammar Bugs
- Laying a Path: Word Study
- Laying a Path: Grammar & Mechanics
- Laying a Path: Supported Writing & Editing
- Laying a Path: Reading Accuracy, Fluency & Comprehension
- Roots Entwined

In the **Consolidated Alphabetic Phase**, readers and writers develop what is called grapho-phoneme units—knowledge of word parts (morphology)—but also syllable chunks of spelling units. The ability to consolidate a series of sounds and letters into units decreases the memory load, which increases sight word development and accurate spelling.

### Help children:

- Notice common spelling patterns between prior and new vocabulary
- Reference the Vowel Chart as they notice typical rime units in spelling
- Reference the Affix Chart during word study activities and spelling
- Engage in both reading and writing word level practice for multisyllable words, practicing pronunciation and stress shifts
- Match the sounds they hear and say to the letters they read and write, noticing unexpected spellings

### Remember:

Students continue to build writing speed and fluency in Intentional Copywork, Dictation & Editing.

In original writing, students continually apply their sight word spelling and pattern knowledge to known and unknown words.

Original writing crosses the curriculum, including note taking, narrating, and writing in different genres and formats.

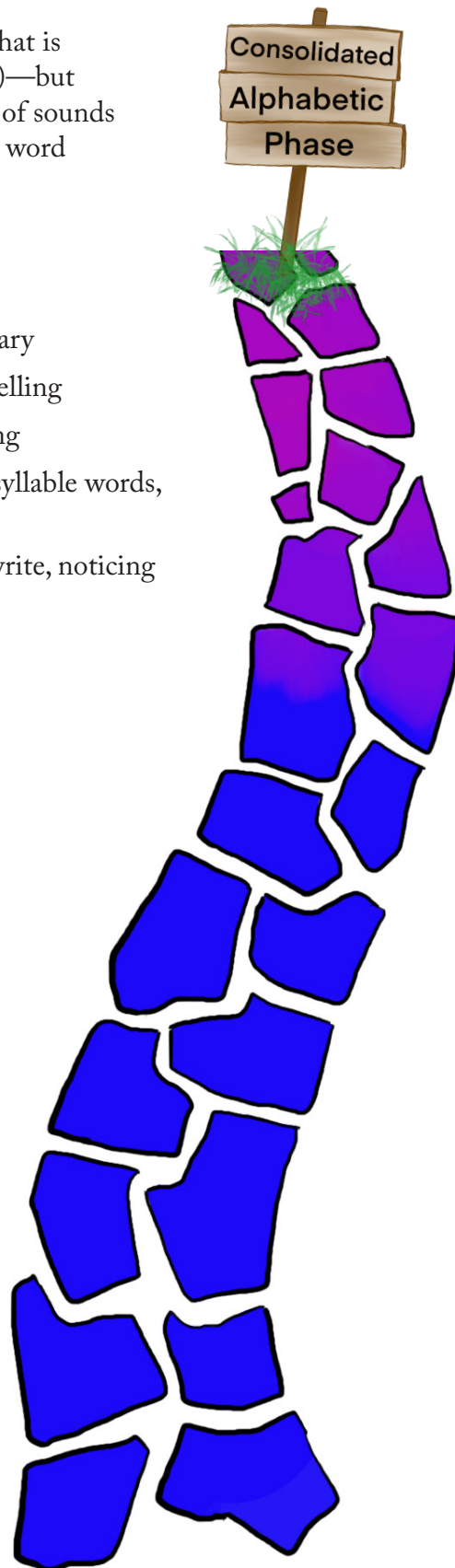
Vocabulary and spelling practice include analyzing the sounds in syllables and words, identifying word parts and grammatical structure, and understanding meaning.

Continue to explicitly teach struggling learners, capitalizing on successes, and helping them experience that learning is fun!

### Rooted in Language can help!

If your child is in this phase and you need support, check out these RiL materials and educator classes:

- Annotating Literary Elements
- Grammar Bugs
- Trees in the Forest
- Laying a Path: Grammar & Mechanics
- Laying a Path: Supported Writing & Editing
- Laying a Path: Reading Accuracy, Fluency & Comprehension
- Laying a Path: Word Study
- Bits & Pieces of Winter
- Roots Entwined



## For more information:

Research comes from Dr. Linnea C. Ehri. Her work, and the work of others, can be found in *The Science of Reading: A Handbook* by Snowling and Hulme (2007).

For a deeper dive into understanding this research as it applies to Rooted in Language approaches, check out our **blog**:

<https://www.rootedinlanguage.com/blog/2023/1/24/ehris-phases-of-sight-word-reading>

and **podcast**:

<https://youtu.be/Z0jDpzkVDUk>