

VōWac®

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SMANTIX! Fall/Winter 2015

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"I hate reading!"

Decoding is the ability to pronounce written words using your knowledge of letter patterns and the letter-sound relationships. Once a

child is able to understand these letter/sound/symbol relationships, they will gain the ability to quickly recognize familiar words and figure out words they may not have ever seen. Sometimes children are able to figure out letter-sound relationships all on their own. However, most will benefit from structured, explicit instruction.

Phonics is just one approach to reading instruction and it is this method that teaches principles of letter-sound relationships, how to sound out words, as well as the exceptions to *all those rules* we have been led to believe exist.

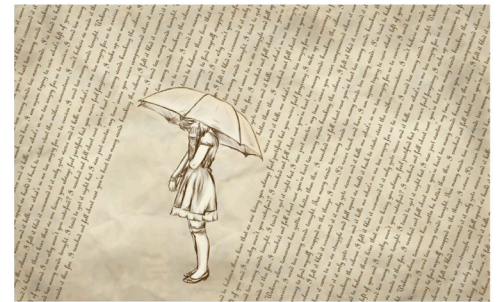
"There's too many words for me to read."

It isn't uncommon for parents and teachers to hear the infamous words, "I hate reading!", or "This is so stupid". This is usually the only way children can express their frustration, confusion, and difficulties in a general way. If kids possessed the vocabulary and the ability to express themselves accurately, you would probably hear things like, "I get stuck when I try to read a lot of words", or "I don't know how to sound out words". They may know their letters and letter-sounds, but tell you they just can't read words on a page.

Parents should know that their child may be having difficulty if they observe their child getting stuck often when reading aloud and if they end up telling their child many of the words. Parents will also

observe their child reading very slow and see an extensive amount of time figuring out words. They will see their child struggle with comprehension because of the amount of time spent trying to sound out words... It will appear their child doesn't know how to put context and words together to create understandable information.

Most parents will see their child become even more frustrated when they say, "Sound it out". At which point, the child will often guess at the word based on the first letter or two. All of these are clues your child may be experiencing reading difficulty.



"There's too many words on the page".

Teachers will see similar clues that will provide indicators a child is struggling with decoding and phonics. One of the first observations will be difficulty in matching sounds and letters, which will affect reading and spelling.

Teachers will often see a very labored decoding process, with much difficulty when attempting to read and spell phonetically. The teacher, too, will see a child guess at a word based on the first couple of letters.

The writing samples will indicate that the simplest of letter sounds and patterns are not transferred onto paper when writing even though the certain letter patterns have been taught. The child fails to

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Fun with Fluency

Fluency is not something that can be taught nor does it simply "come with time". It is a skill. Some would even say it's an art. No matter what the belief, fluency can be improved through activities that allow a child to read aloud. Reading to a family member or with a friend or small group, children can improve fluency using any number of reader's theater activities, choral reading using poetry or lyrics to favorite songs. Younger readers can easily have fun with cadence found in most Dr. Seuss books. As students get older, they can ply their verbal skills and acting talents using many of the verses from Shel Silverstein. Many songs were published using Silverstein's whimsical words. Don't forget to include a couple of tongue twisters as silly as they sound, once mastered, they provide a huge boost to developing fluency skills. Make sure you allow for quiet time for children to read aloud. Practice does make perfect.

Isn't it about time...

to consider a phonics program that will give you the results your reading program promised you?

Use VoWac skills for an entire school year.

Compare it to your existing program. Get better results or you don't buy it



Contact VōWac® for details.

Proficiency Varies with Common Core

States prove to be proficient in providing inconsistent results

Editorial & opinion piece from John Pfeifer, President, VoWac® Publishing Company

Over 40 states have adopted the Common Core educational standards (CCSS) that were intended to demonstrate student academic performance. The goal was to get a national view and an honest academic assessment of how kids are performing and then reporting it so parents and educators could do something about it.

Now that the first batch of test results have been released, it behooves several states to make a slight adjustment on their view of proficiency. Education officials in Ohio, have deemed about two-thirds of their students at most grade levels were proficient in reading and math. In Illinois that number drops to about a third. In Massachusetts, the number is about one-half. All of these students took the same tests and all had very similar scores.

So it boils down to the different labels individual states use to describe the same scores and the same test. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC, divides students into five levels, from 1 - 5. According to the PARCC, students are on track to graduate with the skills they need if they score at level 4 or above.

It should be noted that PPARC is owned and operated by Pearson PLC. It is a British multinational publishing and education company headquartered in London. It is the largest education company and the largest book publisher in the world.

Inflating Performance

Ohio, followed by Arkansas, has now redefined what it means to be proficient on the new Common Core tests. By doing so, student performance levels are inflated. Had Arkansas used PARCC's more stringent definition of proficiency, only 36% of their freshmen would be at level 4 in reading. With Arkansas's new definition, they were able to increase that number to 64%. In the area of algebra, Arkansas reports 60% proficient with the new definition vs. 28%.

Move the Goal Post

California and North Carolina reported results after lumping

students together that either passed or almost passed. So some of the students passed but not really or didn't pass but almost. Even the Education Commissioner in Florida recommended passing rates far lower than other states.

It seems some states have taken it upon themselves to redefine the word proficiency. Merriam-Webster says *advancement in knowledge or skill*. That has been interpreted to mean **any gain in knowledge or skill** makes one proficient. That was hardly the idea premise behind CCSS, which was to determine where/how our kids compared using a global standard.

Some states seem to have embraced the idea where not too many people fail. Before CCSS, each state set its own standards and devised its own tests. Some made it so easy that all students were proficient. Some schools' performance ratings soared higher than ever before. They looked pretty darn good! The success rate of that thinking came home to roost by the number of students attempting to enter college and needing remedial assistance.

Unfortunately there's been too little honest conversation and too little democracy in the development of the Common Core. It has always been a top-down driven process. We see consultants and corporate entrepreneurs where there should be parents and teachers, and more high-stakes testing where there should be none. Until that changes, many will be sitting on the sidelines, waiting for the next fad or the next "big thing" to come along.

Me....I'm going to follow Pearson to the bank....just in case they drop some coin. I could live off the chump change from the billions they've fleeced off the American educational market.

JP



Save your old calendars

If you have a child that needs extra practice writing numbers and learning the days of the week, your old calendars will make a wonderful writing pad. The boxes around each day provide a defined space. Kids can also practice counting and grouping along with spelling days and months. Be sure to double check your calendar's font style. Some numbers and letters are printed in such a way, it may cause some slight confusion about proper formation. Use your imagination. Calendars can make great game boards and score pads, too.



Register at www.vowac.com and gain access to free letter card and letter dice game sheets, updates, writing paper, and downloads that can be used at home or in your classroom. Be sure to include complete contact information so you can receive other freebies and specials throughout the year. Registered and can't log in? Contact us. We'll get it sorted for you!

Reading Skills Plus

VoWac® Publishing Company is proud to present a new resource targeted for older students. **Reading Skills Plus (RSP)** is a consumable workbook that offers an avenue to identify the basic specific skills older students may be missing.

Sad but true, older students often fall through the cracks. Regardless of the reason, they need immediate attention and remediation. It is typical to use a "shotgun" approach when attempting to teach the older student. Exposing him to all the skills whether he needs them or not will surely cover what is missing. Not so fast.

Reading Skills Plus offers activities

based on the sound/symbol system of the English language using the Orton-Gillingham approach. Lessons taught are based on previous lessons/skills learned. The teacher guides the student through each lesson and assesses the skills demonstrated. If a student's performance indicates more remediation is needed, the teacher uses any resources available to teach that skill. When the skill is learned, the student continues in the **RSP** workbook until the remediation is needed.

This logical and sequential approach to mastering word attack skills offers a practical level of success that they can use immediately across the curriculum.

Another factor to consider is older students usually need lower-level skills. It is not unusual to see a 5th or 6th grade student functioning at a 1st grade level. Trying to find a resource that doesn't look primary or babyish to them is difficult at best.

Reading Skills Plus has no pictures. It contains text and activities that quickly go from skill to skill. Even older adult nonreaders using **RSP** don't feel they are being taught down to.

The cost effectiveness of this resource will be a benefit to schools and tutors alike. At \$12 per book, it has proven to be as affordable as it is reliable.

Reading Skills Plus is quickly becoming a widely used resource for Title I, RTI, adult literacy programs, and classrooms.

When you need a resource to teach word attack to older students..... **RSP**.

There's just something about the English language

- **Acupuncture: a jab well done.**
- **When fish are in schools they sometimes take debate.**
- **A thief who stole a calendar got twelve months.**
- **The professor discovered that her theory of earthquakes was on shaky ground.**
- **The batteries were given out free of charge.**
- **A dentist and a manicurist married. They fought tooth and nail.**
- **With her marriage, she got a new name and a dress.**
- **Show me a piano falling down a mineshaft and I'll show you A-flat miner.**
- **You are stuck with your debt if you can't budge it.**
- **Local Area Network in Australia : The LAN down under.**
- **A boiled egg is hard to beat.**
- **If you've seen one shopping centre you've seen a mall.**
- **Police were called to a day care where a three-year-old was resisting a rest.**
- **Did you hear about the fellow whose whole left side was cut off? He's all right now.**
- **If you take a laptop computer for a run you could jog your memory.**
- **A bicycle can't stand alone; it is two tired.**
- **In a democracy it's your vote that counts; in feudalism, it's your Count that votes.**
- **When a clock is hungry it goes back four seconds.**
- **The guy who fell onto an upholstery machine was fully recovered.**
- **He had a photographic memory which was never developed.**
- **Those who get too big for their britches will be exposed in the end.**
- **When she saw her first strands of grey hair, she thought she'd dye.**

Continued from page 1 (Reading)

recognize the letters and their sounds when reading words. It is not uncommon for a teacher to watch a child "zone out" when there are activities dealing with phonics patterns and spelling.

Help at home and school

Without a doubt, kids can help themselves. Often this help will be covertly instigated or guided by parents. Let your child play with magnetic letters. Your refrigerator can become a year-round learning center. Point out road signs and see if your child can identify familiar words. This may be a great activity as you look at written material around your house. Randomly point to letters and words and have your child identify them. Look for familiar words on food and household goods labels, and maybe while watching TV commercials. Identifying words in magazines, newspapers, especially in the comics section, provides great resource for practice.

Carefully sound out the letters and words as you write notes or emails to friends and family. Be sure to discuss some of the various sight words that your child will come across. These will be words that do not follow regular spelling rules, i.e. *said*, *was*, *are have*.

Teachers might have learning center activities where pictures and objects can be sorted by the sound being taught. Provide a tape or digital recorder so the child can play back and hear his own voice.

Engage them in reading and writing activities, requiring them to apply phonics rules. Counters, sound boxes, and magnetic letters are wonderful manipulatives to help teach letter-sound relationships.

Whenever possible, provide more instruction to students identified as needing more help. These students absolutely need teacher guidance. They will seldom excel on their own.

Help from VoWac ala' ORTON-GILLINGHAM

If your school has not adopted curriculum materials that provide systematic and explicit instruction, talk with your principal, reading specialist or curriculum director. Often money will be sited as the reason for not making changes. VoWac's pilot program offers free use of teaching materials and free workbooks. The Orton-Gillingham methods used in VoWac's decoding program have proven effective in hundreds of schools across the nation.

Go from, "I hate reading", to "Listen to me read to you!" VoWac has been getting kids *academically dressed for success* since 1983....it's what we do! Contact VoWac for details to find out how to start a pilot in your school.

LETTER TIC-TAC-TOE

Number of Players: 2 - 4 • Grade Level: K & 1

Materials needed: 30-sided Letter Die, Item (LD) or a deck of Alphabet Playing cards (Item APC)

Use only the letter cards (remove the picture cards). • Something to write with • Game template(s)

Most kids know how to play tic-tac-toe. If they don't, it's quite easy to learn. Here's a simple twist to the game that will keep them interested a bit longer than X's and O's. Each grid below contains a vowel in the center.

Before play begins, decide which grid will be used. Players may take turns going first once a grid is complete.

Players can choose their own vowel for the bank grids at the bottom. The first player rolls the letter die and

writes the letter rolled in one of the eight spaces. The next player rolls the letter die and writes that letter in one of the remaining

spaces. It may or may not be in line horizontally, vertically, or diagonally to make a three-letter word. If he can make a three letter word then he gets a point. The next player rolls the letter die and attempts to either make a word or fill in a space. Play continues until the

grid is filled. Some grids may contain few words. If Alphabet Playing cards are used, simply place all the cards in the center in a strewn

manner. Once a card is chosen and recorded on the grid, the card is placed back in the pile and mixed before the next player draws.



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LETTER
TIC-TAC-TOE

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