

Examine Your Practices

Now it's your turn. Ask yourself the following questions to examine your instructional practices and materials as they relate to scope and sequence.

1. Do I know my basic phonics scope and sequence without looking? (I should always have the big picture in mind—the prerequisite skills taught, what is coming next, etc.)
2. Does my instruction have a formal scope and sequence, or am I selecting skills based on each week's readings? If so, on what am I basing my decisions? How am I keeping track of which skills have been taught, when, and how many times to ensure ample review and repetition?
3. Have I noticed specific skills with which my students struggle? Where are they in the scope and sequence? What has been taught before these skills? Is there a relation between this new skill and a previously taught skill? How much time am I spending on this skill? Is it at least four to six weeks? What support pieces do I have for students to practice this skill?

Try these activities to test the effectiveness of your scope and sequence.

1. Take one of the books students are reading this week. Make a copy of a few pages. Then compare the words to your phonics scope and sequence. Focus first on the phonics skill taught this week. Circle all the words containing this skill. Can all these words be sounded out using the new skill and all previously taught skills? If so, leave the word circled. Then put a box around all the words that can be sounded out using previously taught skills. If a word contains even one sound spelling not taught, it doesn't count (e.g., students can sound out *sat* because they have learned all the consonants and the short vowel *a*, but can't read *chat* because they haven't learned consonant digraphs like *ch* yet). Then put an *X* through all the high-frequency or sight words you have formally taught students. What's left? Is it a large number of words? Do these words have anything in common (that you could base a phonics mini-lesson on)? Is the percentage of words that students can't read based on what

you've taught larger than 30% or 40%? If so, how are your students accessing these words (guessing, context, picture clues)? Is this book a good fit for this point in your phonics scope and sequence?

2. Create a path for acceleration for students who enter your grade above level . Administer a comprehensive phonics survey that is linked to your curriculum's scope and sequence. Place the students into that scope and sequence and, if necessary, continue on to the next grade level's skills. Marching through these skills and standards in an organized and systematized way will benefit your students and make the teaching and planning easier. For example, some students enter Grade I having mastered reading words with short vowels (e.g., *ran, hop*). I do a quick check to see if they can read short-vowel words with blends and digraphs (e.g., *slip, shop*), and if they can, I start them in the scope and sequence at final e (e.g., *take, like, hope*). This instruction occurs primarily during small group time, but you can fold what students are learning into whole class work through the blending work (I'll discuss in depth later), modeling of words while reading, and small targeted lessons while other students are engaged in easier practice activities (e.g., rereading a simple decodable text that above-level students don't need to reread).
3. Note "bumps in the road" in your current sequence. Are there places where students slow down or seem to have challenges grasping the new skills? Perhaps too much is taught too fast (e.g., more than a couple spellings for a given sound), or there is a big cognitive leap in understanding the new principle (e.g., jumping from one letter standing for a sound to letter combinations

Especially for
**ADVANCED
LEARNERS**

4 BEST EFFECT

Writing Is a Window Into Phonics Growth

- Each week, check the writing of a subset of your students (four to six) to note transfer of previously taught phonics skills. *Are they using them consistently in writing?*
- Provide more whole and small group instruction and practice on previously taught skills that aren't transferring to writing.
- Each month, meet with your grade-level teacher teams and evaluate students' writing for phonics mastery.
- Add more dictation work for sound spellings not transferring rapidly or consistently enough.

standing for a sound). It might also be that the new skill is causing confusion because of its similarity to a previous skill that has not yet been mastered. Keep in mind that some skills require longer to teach, practice, and apply. Make adjustments to your curriculum's scope and sequence based on your students' needs. Separate confusing letter sounds and teach the first letter sound to mastery before introducing the second. Also, stretch out the instruction of sounds with multiple spellings (e.g., long vowels, complex vowels). Many of your students might only be able to handle two new spellings for the sound each week of instruction.

4. Look at students' writing to see evidence of transfer from reading to writing. Ask yourself, "Which previously taught skills aren't transferring?" Adjust your scope and sequence to include more work with these skills. Regularly evaluating students' writing for evidence of phonics knowledge and for what skills need reinforcing is a great monthly practice. I recommend doing this with grade-level teachers. Often a fresh eye on your students' work can provide valuable insights.