

# Real Phonics and Phony Phonics

## What They Are and How They Differ

(The following discussion of “Read Phonics and Phony Phonics” is abstracted from the Sept. 1974 issue of LITE (Let’s Improve Today’s Education” and reprinted from the *Reading Informer* of May, 1975)

Because of the outcry from parents for a return to phonics, many publishers claim that their programs include phonics. To meet the demand, authors of Look-Say programs have added “clue” to the sight programs, which they call phonetic analysis. Parents still know what they mean by phonics. What they don’t realize is that the schools and publishers have adopted a different meaning for the word. Herein lies the confusion.

Below are the two definitions of phonics, a brief list of the beginning skills, and the order in which they are usually developed. The sequence in which the beginning reader is taught is the key to distinguishing phony phonics from basic phonics.

### REAL PHONICS

**(BASIC PHONICS** also called: code-emphasis, alphabetic phonics, intensive phonics, systematic phonics, encoding and decoding, synthetic phonics, basic phonemic phonics, real phonics.

**(A) DEFINITION:** Learning all the consonants and vowel sounds which the letters of the alphabet represent, synthesizing sounds into words, getting meaning from the sequence and structure of these sounds *before the whole words are taught.*

**(B) SEQUENCE FOLLOWED:**

1. Learning which **letters** and which sets of letters of the alphabet stand for which **speech sounds**. Letter names may or may not be taught at the same time. (Hearing, seeing, saying and writing are all used to enforce learning. Phonics is more than sounding out – it uses all avenues to the mind.)
2. All the **consonant and vowel** sounds are taught by the end of first grade.
3. Synthesizing sounds into words (some form of blending). Initially the words, which are chosen, will have phonemically regular relationships. Irregularities will be gradually introduced.
4. Using principles (rules) governing spelling and pronunciation as a frame of reference and as feedback.
5. Reading across a word from left to right. Pronouncing the sounds of unfamiliar words in the normal order from left to right.
6. Getting meaning from the speech sound of the word, using context to confirm meaning, always drawing upon the resources of the hearing and speaking vocabulary the child already knows.
7. Providing immediate and direct practice through writing, reading and spelling.

8. Reading story-type materials where the student will be using directly the skill he has learned.
- (C) The skills in this beginning stage are:
1. The ability to decode and encode (read and write)
  2. The ability to “react to the clusters of letters and get at the sound that is represented. Once sound approach is worth six possible clues.” (1)

## PHONETIC ANALYSIS

**PHONETIC ANALYSIS** also called: reading for meaning, meaning emphasis, analytic phonics, intrinsic phonics, gradual phonics, phony phonics.

(A) **DEFINITION:** This method of learning to read starts out with basic sight vocabulary which the student must memorize by shape before (many of) the sounds (which the letters represent) are taught. After the sight vocabulary has been firmly established through the use of “clues (below), the sound values of the letters are learned by analyzing the word previously memorized (phonetic analysis). The list memorized may vary from 50 to more than 100 words, most of which do not follow the common phonetic principles of the language.

(B) **SEQUENCE FOLLOWED** (Called “learning the word attack skills”):

1. Learn the shapes of the words in the initial sight vocabulary.
2. Learn to use context as a clue to word recognition and meaning.
3. Learning to use pictures as clues to word recognition and meaning.
4. Learning to use structural analysis (breaking the words into “units of meaning” by removing prefixes and suffixes before they have learned the sounds of the letters).  
Example: the word returning re-turn-ing – **turn** is a memorized word and the child is to figure out the meaning using context cues.
5. Learn to use phonetic analysis as a clue to word recognition. This is only done when the other clues have been established and the sight vocabulary memorized.
6. Learn the consonants:
  - a) Learning the sounds of consonants through using known words in the sight vocabulary list.
  - b) Consonant substitution: Borrowing a consonant from the beginning or ending of a known word, substituting it at the beginning (or end) of another known word and arriving at a new word; using clues (shape, context, pictures) to check the result.  
Example: If a child has memorized the words **run** and **bat** and the teacher wants to introduce the word **bun**, the child is told, “It starts like bat, but ends like run, so it must be bun!” **This comprises most of the phonics taught in this method. Much of it is done with workbooks where the child merely fills in the missing letter. The work is mainly visual.**
  - c) Learning the vowel sounds, which may begin at the end of first grade: “Most children learn to use visual cues to vowel sounds in second grade” (2)
  - d) Developing or “intuiting” generalizations. (This is the term for rules, which may or may not ever be actually taught.)
  - e) Reading story-type materials, which have words repeated frequently to aid in memorization. The same principal of “repeated exposure” is used in the reading materials when new words are introduced and then repeated as often as possible in the text.

(C) The student's "word-attack skills" in this process are:

1. Nothing but the shape of the word.
2. Using picture clues.
3. Context Clues.
4. Using structural analysis (breaking the word into units of meaning).
5. Phonemic analysis (consonant substitution; recalling a similar word).
6. Using various methods in combination.

- (1) "Reading, Writing, and Creativity." Raymond Laurita: Bernice Straub Publishing Co., 1973.
- (2) "Evaluating Reading Programs," K.J. Smith, 1974, California Reading Conference.

## Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

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This handy little comparison of real and phony phonics is excellent. I can testify that during my 21 years as public school teacher, I saw phony phonics taught quite often in workshops I attended. I am sure that phony phonics sounds surreal to anyone who has not been subjected to the indoctrination process students are subjected to in many schools of education. A recent book defending phony phonics is Margaret Moustafa's, *Beyond Traditional Phonics: Research Discoveries and Reading Instruction*, published by Heinemann, a popular whole-language publisher. There you will find a perfect example of phony phonics, and how an obviously very intellectual person goes about defending it.

My district trained me in two dyslexia programs: *Rene Herman's* program and *Project Read: The Language Circle*. I was also trained by Lorna Simmons to use **Classroom Phonics**, which later became the basis for **Saxon Phonics** when John Saxon bought it from Mrs. Simmons. It was actually an adaptation of Cox' *Alphabet-Phonics*, an Orton-Gillingham dyslexia program. What interested me was that all my dyslexia training was in "real phonics." Yet in the classrooms they were using "phony phonics." That was a strange paradox since they were curing the students' dyslexia with the very program that could have prevented it.

Be sure and visit the Education Page of my website [www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net) and [www.blendphonics.org](http://www.blendphonics.org) for more information on phonics. A special feature of my website is the number of highly effective phonics programs that I offer for free download. Two that are good examples of "real phonics" are Florence Akin's 1913 classic, *Word Mastery*, which was used for many years by people associated with the Orton Dyslexia Society, and Hazel Loring's 1980 *Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for First Grade*. I have used Loring's program to teach students from kindergarten through adult. It has proven to be a method of choice for children with artificially induced dyslexia caused by the look-and-say method because of the almost blinding speed of remediation. And then, for the hearty soul who wants the very best; there is **Webster's Spelling Book!**

I republished Hazel Loring's *Blend Phonics*, Florence Akin's *Word Mastery*, and *Webster's Spelling Book Method for Teaching Reading and Spelling* in paperback. They are all available from Amazon and Barnes & Nobles.