GUIDANCE FOR ASSESSING PROGRAMMES and APPROACHES

If you are looking at a programme, check out **What we DO recommend** and **What we DON'T recommend** lists as these will give you a good place to start. If the programme is not on our list there are some things you can do for yourself to figure out if the programme is evidence-based and worth your money and time.

It's a good starting point if a programme is using the following terms: decodable; systematic; synthetic phonics, sequential, cumulative; explicit; structured literacy; science of reading; the alphabetic code; orthographic mapping.

What you're looking for at a first glance is:

- Do they teach the 44 sounds of the English language?
- Do they teach the spelling rules of the English language systematically?
- Do they teach phoneme awareness?
- Do they teach the six syllables of the English language?
- Do they have Decodable books?
- Do they have a scope and sequence?
- Do they have research that was done by others rather than themselves?
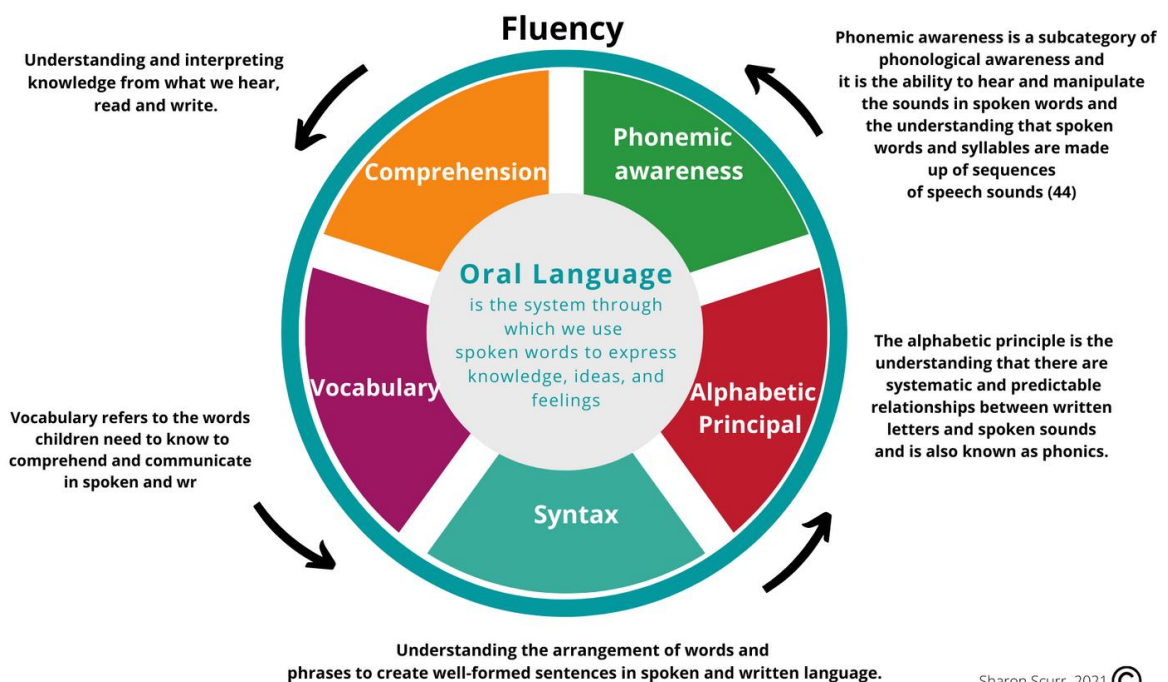- Do they teach encoding? (spelling)

What next?

Then you would start to look at the programmes scope and sequence in more detail. Not every scope and sequence is the same and not every scope and sequence is systematic or synthetic – this is where the sounds build on one another systematically (logically), and is why we have created the two lists **What we DO recommend** and **What we DON'T recommend**.

If you're following an Orton Gillingham approach or synthetic systematic phonics that follows an evidence based approach here is what we know the scope and sequence should include at

the beginning and what it shouldn't include. This approach is highly recommended for our dyslexic kids.

Being systematic, sequential, cumulative, and evidence-based, means you're following the five components of reading from which came from the National Reading Panels report (NRP) which is included in the years of research called the Science of Reading.

- Phonological awareness
- Systematic synthetic phonics/the Alphabetical Code
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension
- Syntax (has been added)

Fluency

Understanding and interpreting knowledge from what we hear, read and write.

Phonemic awareness is a subcategory of phonological awareness and it is the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words and the understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds (44)

Comprehension

Phonemic awareness

Oral Language is the system through which we use spoken words to express knowledge, ideas, and feelings

Vocabulary

Alphabetic Principal

The alphabetic principle is the understanding that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds and is also known as phonics.

Vocabulary refers to the words children need to know to comprehend and communicate in spoken and wr

Syntax

Understanding the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in spoken and written language.

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Dyslexic children need to learn the alphabetic principle.

Dyslexic children need to learn the alphabetic principle in an order that builds from simple steps to harder steps and must be taught explicitly using an evidence based approach called Structured Literacy that follows a scope and sequence.

A sample of a systematic **synthetic** (synthetic being the way it is taught) phonics approach, could start with:

- VC Start with a, then e i o u
- CVC
- Digraphs
- Blends (making sure they are taught as separate sounds /b/ and /l/ not /bl/)
- Plural s

- Floss

For an Orton Gillingham approach it could start with:

- Closed
- Open
- Digraphs
- Blends (making sure they are taught as separate sounds /b/ and /l/ not /bl/)
- Silent E
- Plurals
- Floss Rule
- CK rule

V – Vowel C – Consonant

Do all systematic synthetic phonics programme teach the rules?

Not all systematic **synthetic** phonics programmes teach spelling or the teach rules, but they will teach all the 44 sounds in a systematic and cumulative way in reading. Children would still be using decodable books.

NOTE: Analytical Phonics is more about learning the phonic sound in isolation with no transfer to reading and writing and they don't cover the 44 sounds of the alphabet. This programme does not use decodable books; it uses PM readers. Refer to [Why can't my child read?](#)

Some things to look out for:

Silent E: you teach silent E (a-e, e-e, i-e, o-e, u-e) one after the other or as one concept as the rule is the same. This may be near the beginning of a scope and sequence, i.e. after cvc, or it could come after cvcc.

Controlled R: you would teach controlled R sounds in an order one after the other or together especially /ir/ /ur/ /er/as they sound the same to Kiwis.

Digraphs should be taught one after the other sh, ch, the two sounds of th, wh, ng, and qu. You can extend these in a later session with the spelling rule: long spelling after short vowel i.e./ tch/ and /dge/.

You can also use this rule for /ck/ spelling at the end of a word.

Word Families/Onset and Rime

Word families don't teach our children to spell, they teach our kids to memorise and we all know memory is not our kids' strong point. This is a whole language approach to learning. It can also be referred to as chunking.

Ake is a word family but why teach it like this when in fact it's a silent E, 'ang'/'ing'/'ong'/'ung' are word families; we should be teaching it as /'ng'/. We don't recommend Onset and Rime at/ug/ot/et in print; this is only recommended for phonemic awareness (sound) – not for print. The evidence backs this up; we need to break up each sound and map it to memory, not memorise a chunk.

Stay away from chunking into word families/onset and rime for our dyslexic kids.

Doubling letters FF/LL/SS/ZZ

Doubling letters 'f', 'l' or 's', 'z' at the end of a word has a rule that makes this easier to learn – double if one syllable has a short vowel and ends in 'f', 'l', 's' or 'z'. The floss rule! – Again no need for word families like 'ell', 'ill', etc.

Syllable division

It should include syllable division; Orton Gillingham uses the six syllables of phonology. We know there are other systematic phonic programmes that still teach syllables but not under the six syllables.

Things have changed a lot in the last few years. We now know what best practice is for our dyslexic kids, is also best practice for ALL kids.

NOTE – I haven't mentioned computer programmes, in my opinion, they are not suitable for teaching. We only recommend these for review, whether they have workbooks or not. But you can apply the above information to see if the programme is covering the right things in a systematic order for your child.

We know and understand there are lots of tutors who use online programmes but the main difference here we hope is they have taught the child the sound then used the computer programme and books to review the concepts taught.

NOTE – Often, there will be insufficient information on a site to assess this. In that situation, you can email the company directly and ask those questions. We'd love to hear their responses, and can use that information to then place it under one of the lists so everyone else can benefit from your enquiries too.

Sometimes we will accept an assessment of the quality of a programme if it is endorsed by a well-known group that supports evidence-based interventions, such as Spelfabet or Speld Aus. If there is doubt about it being evidence-based, we won't be putting it on our "recommended" list.

This document was created by Sharon Scurr founder of the deb in October 2020 and updated August 2021 and December 2021