

The Research Basis for the Hooked on Phonics® Learn to Read Pre-K Levels

The **Hooked on Phonics® Learn to Read** program uses systematic instruction and multisensory materials to help children learn to read. The instructional approach and techniques are based on current research about how children learn to read, and the levels build systematically from letters and sounds, then to words and sentences, and ultimately to reading fluency.

The **Hooked on Phonics Learn to Read** Pre-K levels comprise the first two levels of a research-based, eight-level program. The Pre-K levels are designed to help build phonemic awareness and teach beginning reading skills. They were developed in response to the increasingly documented principle that children who have a basic understanding of letters and letter sounds before kindergarten become more successful readers. They are designed to help parents work collaboratively with their preschool-aged children to prepare them to learn to read. Using the learn-practice-play approach common to all Hooked on Phonics programs, **Hooked on Phonics Learn to Read** Pre-K levels help children build phonemic awareness, learn letter recognition, and understand the association of letters with their letter sounds.

Reading Readiness before School

Myriad studies and sources demonstrate that children who are in a reading-readiness stage when they begin school are more likely to become successful readers.

Organizations lauding reading readiness include the U.S. Department of Education, which asserts that children ages three to four should be able to identify some letters and make some letter-sound matches, understand that print carries a message, identify familiar signs and labels, and make some attempts to read. Additionally, the National Governors Association released a report that highlights the importance of ensuring that every child enter school prepared to learn to read. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's Partnership for Reading notes, "Children who go to kindergarten already knowing the shapes and names of the letters of the alphabet, and how to write them, have an easier time learning to read."

A large body of research supports reading readiness. An early study by Beck and Juel reported the overriding importance of children acquiring prerequisite reading skills early on. Perhaps more important, researchers also report that these early skills predict later reading comprehension, and that conversely, children who start learning to read later seldom become skillful readers.

Application: The **Hooked on Phonics Learn to Read** Pre-K levels recognize that literacy is a learned skill and that coherent, skill-based instruction must begin in the years before the child enters kindergarten. To help children build phonemic awareness and reach reading readiness, they provide step-by-step instructions for parents and engaging multisensory materials, such as workbooks, flash cards, online interactive games, and DVDs to help parents prepare their children to learn to read.

Parents as Teachers

Parents are their children's first teachers. In general, children who receive good instruction and parenting at home are more likely to become good readers. The U.S. Department of Education notes, "Students' exposure to various reading materials at home and family support for students' school and literacy efforts can play a critical role in

students' growth as readers, and also says, "Without doubt, reading with children spells success for early literacy." The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommends daily reading to children from six months of age. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the International Reading Association, and the National Commission on Reading concur that the single most important activity for developing literacy skills in young children is reading aloud to them. Clearly, parental involvement is critical for a child to achieve reading readiness before entering school.

Application: The **Hooked on Phonics Learn to Read** Pre-K levels are designed to lead parents step by step so they can guide their children through all the activities and lessons. It provides easy-to-use instructions on every page of the workbooks, a tutorial video on the DVDs, and a quick-start guide for quick reference. Each unit in the Learn to Read Pre-K levels ends with a storybook for parents to read to their children.

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness refers to the ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words. Phonemes are the smallest units of sound constituting spoken language. As children build phonemic awareness, they recognize that words like cat and bat rhyme, and that cow and kite share the same beginning sound. The notion that phonemic awareness is integral to reading readiness and future reading success is prevalent throughout various research studies. A study by Fielding-Barnsley states, "Despite the differing teaching methodologies, the researchers agree on the importance of phonemic awareness and alphabet knowledge in early reading instruction." Studies have also shown that the most accurate predictor of early reading capability, even prior to actual reading acquisition, is a child's understanding of how words are made up of sounds. When children learn to discern the different sounds that make up words, they exhibit more competence in reading, word recognition, and spelling.

The National Reading Panel study Teaching Children to Read found that "teaching phonemic awareness to children significantly improves their reading more than instruction that lacks any attention to [phonemic awareness]. . . . This training was the cause of improvement in students' phonemic awareness, reading, and spelling following training."

Application: The **Hooked on Phonics Learn to Read** Pre-K levels were developed on the basis of scientific reading research that supports phonemic awareness. The principles of phonemic awareness are woven throughout these first two levels of the Learn to Read program.

The Alphabetic Principle

The International Reading Association defines the alphabetic principle as the form of instruction that teaches children about letters, letter patterns, and how these patterns correspond to spoken words. Research shows that children learning to read need early and extensive practice working with these sound-spelling patterns.

As suggested by experts, after acquiring phonemic awareness, children appear to acquire alphabetic knowledge in a sequence that begins with letter names, then letter shapes, and finally letter sounds. Studies indicate that both letter recognition and knowledge of letter sounds are necessary for reading readiness and that children who are instructed in letter-sound correspondence outperform children who have not had this instruction.

Application: The **Hooked on Phonics Learn to Read** Pre-K levels were developed on the basis of scientific reading research that supports oral language, alphabetic knowledge, and print awareness. This principle of the name-shape-sound sequence for alphabet acquisition is evident in the Pre-K levels, which systematically teach the basics of uppercase and lowercase letter recognition and letter sounds.

Learn-Practice-Play Approach

Young children learn through hands-on, meaningful experiences, and they must practice what they've learned. The findings of one research paper by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development stresses, "Children need extensive practice applying their knowledge of sound-spelling relationships to the task of reading as they are learning them." They must practice the letters and words they learn to gain automatic recognition and a foundational knowledge of spelling-sound correspondences.

Children also learn from word play and games. Researcher Delores Dickerson asserts that children stay on task longer when having fun and found in one study a 30 to 53 percent greater level of learning effectiveness when using a game rather than a worksheet to teach. She concluded that the game format not only encouraged children and provided instant feedback, but also reinforced the lesson.

Application: The learn-practice-play approach is used throughout the **Hooked on Phonics Learn to Read** Pre-K levels. **Learn:** Each workbook activity teaches children the letter names, shapes, and sounds, and each unit starts with a phonemic awareness-building activity. **Practice:** The workbook review pages, flash card games, and online interactive games reinforce these skills. **Play:** Each unit ends with a storybook that was specially written to support what children have just learned. Play is extended in the fun-filled DVDs, which contain hours of songs, rhymes, and animation that reinforce and help build phonemic awareness.

Summary

This paper includes a sample of the research on which the **Learn to Read** Pre-K levels are based. These were developed in light of current research showing that children need phonemic awareness before learning to read, and that students who achieved reading readiness before entering school have greater success as readers. The learn-practice-play approach provides bite-sized skills children can master in one session, progresses cumulatively, and ensures success and measurable progress with each session. The **Learn to Read** Pre-K levels provide parents with enjoyable, high-interest activities and stories to practice and reinforce reading readiness skills with their children in an engaging way. The **Learn to Read** Pre-K levels incorporate phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle and the use of parents as teachers- all proven approaches for helping children achieve reading readiness and set the stage for becoming successful readers.

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20 Carr, Davis, Durr, and Hagen 1998; National Association for the Education of Young Children/International Reading Association 1998.

21 Fielding-Barnsley 1997, 85; Snow 1998.

22 Jensen 2005.

23 Grossen 1997.

24 Nathan and Stanovich 1991, 178.

25 May 1990.

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