

# A Proposal for a Phonics-First Framework for the Diagnosis and Teaching of Educational Factors

Comparing the Typical Sight-Word-First Framework  
(Configuration and Context Clues)  
of Teaching Beginning Reading  
with the Phonic-First Framework

In Regard to Their  
Theories, Practices & Outcomes

[This is a work-in-progress that will be updated as time permits]

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## Preface

The “Typical Scope and Sequence of Reading Skills” comes from Eldon E. Ekwall and James L. Shanker’s *Diagnosis and Remediation of the Disabled Reader*, 3rd Edition (Allyn and Bacon, 1976, 1983, 1988). I call this the “Standard Model for Teaching Reading” since it seems to drive instruction in most American classrooms. This is from Chapter 3, “A Framework for the Diagnosis and Teaching of Educational Factors.”

Notice that sight-words are an integral part of their understanding of the reading process. “Basic Sight Words” are taken from standard lists such as Dolch or Fry and memorized without reference to any phonics. “Other Sight Words” refers to words which become sight words through experience reading without specific attempts at memorization from lists.

My thesis is that a **faulty understanding of the reading process**  
leads to **faulty initial reading instruction**,  
which then creates **faulty student reading**,  
fueling the development of **faulty diagnostic procedures**,  
that further exacerbating the problem with **faulty remediation practices**.

Notice that “configuational clues” and “context clues” **precede** “phonetic analysis” in Ekwall and Shanker’s “Scope of The Reading Skills.” This “Standard Model of Reading Instruction” has been popular at least since Huey’s 1908 *Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading*. The combination of sight word instruction, configuration clues, and context clues is the leading cause artificially induced whole-word dyslexia (pseudo-dyslexia).

The Whole-Language theory of Frank Smith and Kenneth Goodman are in line with this model. It was this **defective model of reading** that informed much of the in-service instruction that I received during my 21 years in public education, billed variously as Whole-Language, Guided-Reading, Balanced-Literacy, Literature Driven Instruction, Psycholinguistic Approach, and in its remedial aspects, Reading Recovery, etc.

This “Scope of Reading Skills” is the paradigm that has influenced the thinking and practice of classroom teachers and curriculum designers. Analyzing the kind of instruction that this paradigm inevitably creates will enable us to **envision a different paradigm** that will avoid the damaging effects of sight-word instruction on beginning reading students. In fact this paradigm is older than the current one, being the leading theory since the invention of the alphabet.

### Remember

Different theories.  
Different Procedures.  
Different Outcomes.

**Better Theories**  
**Better teaching**  
**Better outcomes.**

On the next page are the two charts illustrating two paradigms of beginning reading instruction that we will discuss in the rest of this paper, by way of comparison and contrast, to see which is better. The charts are important because they allows us to see at-a-glance the significant differences and commonalities of each theory of reading. In terms of the *Reading Triangle*, Ekwall & Shanker’s Scope would be the Counter Clockwise Perceptual Path, producing Subjective Readers (guessers); whereas my Phonics-First instruction would represent the Clockwise Perceptual path producing Objective Readers.

# *Side by Side Comparison & Contrast*

**Ekwall & Shanker'**

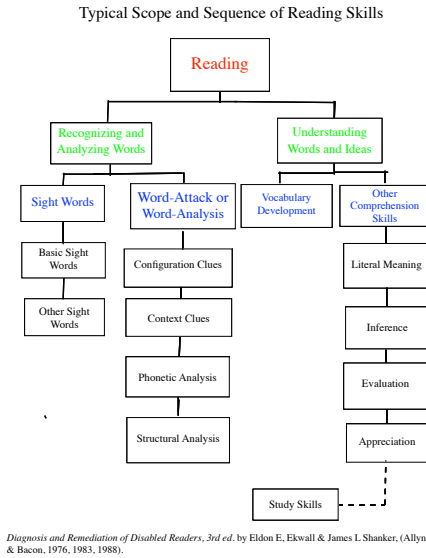
**Typical Sight-Word First**

**Scope of Reading Skills**

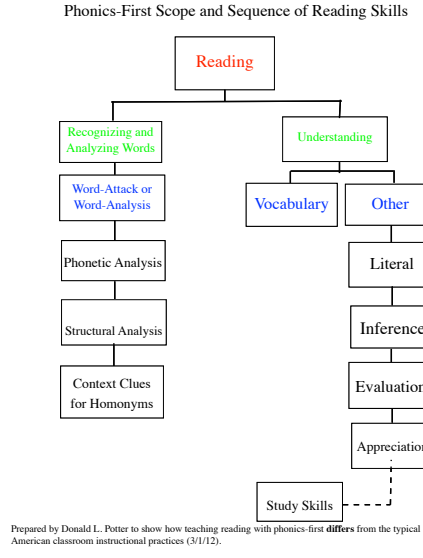
**Donald L. Potter's**

**Blend Phonics Phonics-First**

**Scope of Reading Skills**



1



2

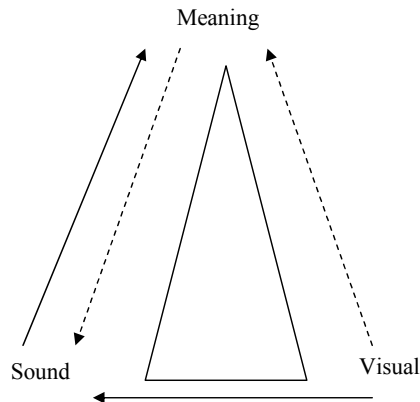
Notice carefully the *differences* and *similarities* of the two **Scope of Reading Skills** above. They both teach phonics, but Ekwall & Shanker (the typical reading program) place Sight-Word Identification prior to and in a separate section to be taught separately from phonics. Ekwall & Shanker also include Configuration and Context clues under Word-Attack or Word-Analysis, whereas Mr. Potter's Phonics-First Framework reserves Context Clues for disentangling homonyms.

A comparison of the two charts reveals the radical differences between the two approaches to reading. Many people today claim to teach phonics, but it is in the sense that Ekwall & Shanker diagram here, they give Phonics a secondary and subsidiary role to Sight-Words, Configuration and Context clues. These differences have serious implications.

Their implementation of these two paradigms produce two radically different types of readers based on the perceptual path the students have been trained to follow to identify words. **Objective Readers** read "from the sounds" represented by the print (the Code), whereas **Subjective Readers** read "from the meaning" of the words using configuration, context clues, and some phonics applied secondarily. See "Reading Triangle" on next page.

# The Reading Triangle

## Two Perceptual Routes to Meaning



1. **Clockwise** perceptual path: “Sound” approach to teaching reading. The Objective Route: “Visual” to “Sound” to “Meaning.” Two stops to “Meaning.”
2. **Counter clockwise** perceptual path: “Whole-word, sight-word, meaning” approach to teaching reading. The Subjective Route: “Visual” to “Meaning,” sound appearing as an afterthought. One stop to “Meaning.”

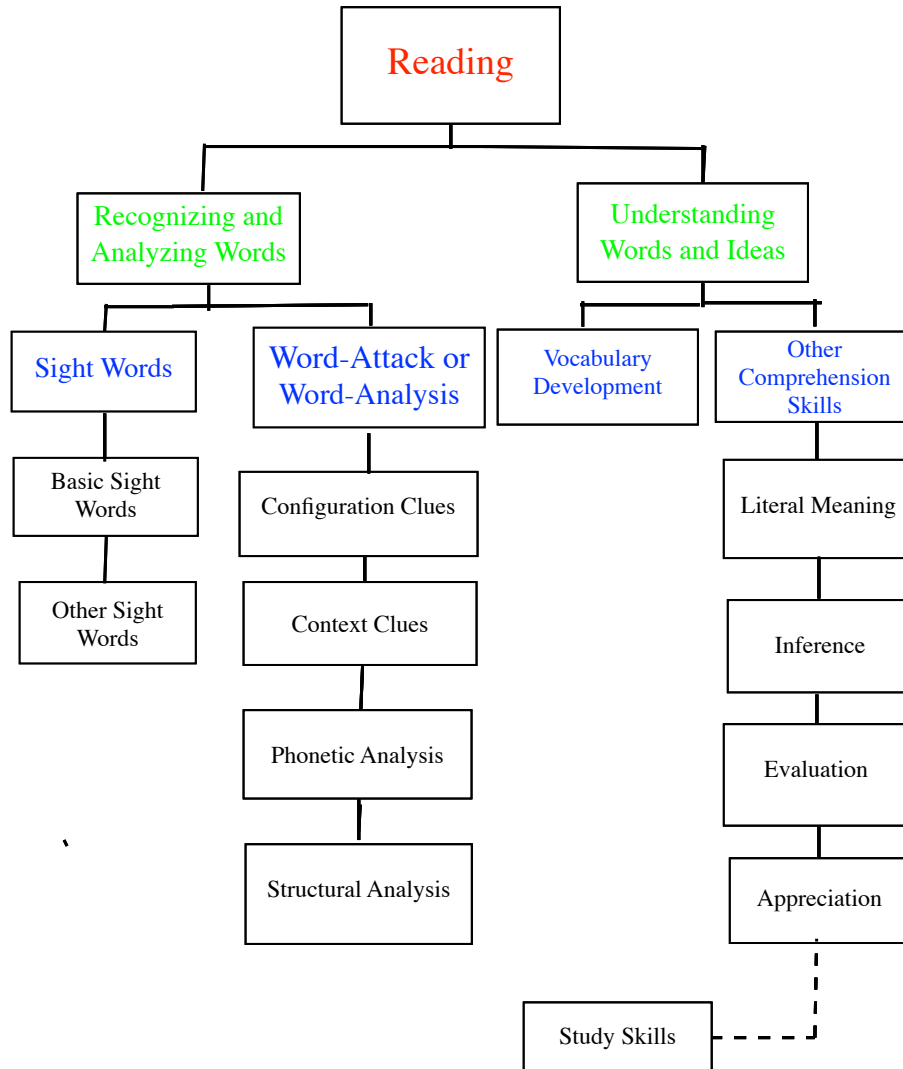
Early American Psychologist wrongly concluded that only one stop on such perceptual routes could be performed automatically, but that secondary stops had to be performed consciously. A form of this chart was published by Henry Suzzallo in 1913 in *The Cyclopedia of Education*, Volume 3.

This is a *conflict diagram* because a student trying to read from the “Meaning” and from the “Sound” **at the same time** will experience a conflict.

Note: The path between the “Visual” and “Sound” is shorter, but the path from “Visual” to “Sound” to “Meaning” requires two stops. The “Visual” to “Meaning” path only requires one stop, but students reading “from meaning” can not get to the “sound” until they first get the “Meaning.” To go directly (one stop) from the “Visual” to the “Meaning” always requires an element of **guessing**. Guessing is built into the “Meaning” method of teaching reading. The perceptual routes are established by initial reading instruction: “from the Sounds” or “from the Meaning.” They are difficult to change once established.

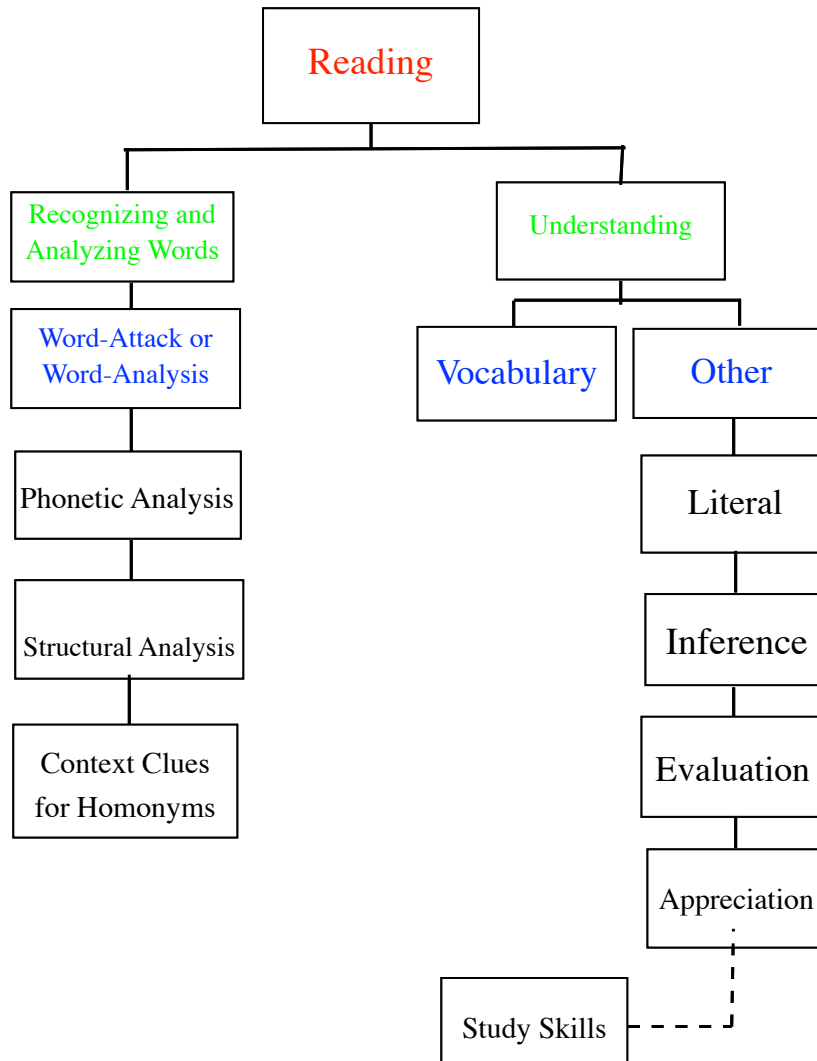
The two different approaches lead to two **different** and **opposite** perceptual types: “Objective” readers who read accurately “from the sound” and “subjective” readers who read inaccurately “from the meaning.”

## Typical Scope and Sequence of Reading Skills



*Diagnosis and Remediation of Disabled Readers, 3rd ed.* by Eldon E. Ekwall & James L. Shanker, (Allyn & Bacon, 1976, 1983, 1988).

## Phonics-First Scope and Sequence of Reading Skills



Prepared by Donald L. Potter to show how teaching reading with phonics-first **differs** from the typical American classroom instructional practices (3/1/12).

## **I. The Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary: Alphabetical Order**

a about after again all always am an and any are around as ask at ate away be

because been before best better big black blue both bring brown but buy by

call came can carry clean cold come could cut

did do does done don't down draw drink

eat eight every

fall far fast find first five fly for found four from full funny

gave get give go goes going good got green grow

had has have he help her here him his hold hot how hurt

I if in into is it its

jump just

keep kind know

laugh let light like little live long look

made make many may me much must my myself

never new no not now

of off old on once one only open or our out over own

pick play please pretty pull put

ran read red ride right round run

said saw say see seven shall she show sing sit six sleep small so some soon start stop

take tell ten thank that the their them then there these they think this those three to today together  
too try two

under up upon us use

very

walk want warm was wash we well went were what when where which white who why will wish  
with work would write

yellow yes you your

## II. The Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary: Grammatical Categories

**Conjunctions:** and as because but if or

**Prepositions:** about after at by down for from in into of on over to under upon

**Pronouns:** he her him his I it its me my myself our she that them these they this those us we what which who you your

**Adverbs:** again always around away before far fast first here how just much never no not now off once only out so soon then there today together too up very well when where why yes.

**Adjectives:** a all an any best better big black blue both brown clean cold eight every five four full funny good green hot kind light little long many new old one own pretty red right round seven six small some ten the three two warm white yellow

**Verbs:** *am are ask ate be been bring buy call came can carry come could cut did do does done don't draw drink eat fall find fly found gave get give go goes going got grow had has have help hold hurt is jump keep know laugh let like live look made make may must open pick play please pull put ran read ride run said saw say see shall show sing sit sleep start stop take tell thank think try use walk want was wash went were will wish work would write*

Note: Verbs can be classified as Full Verbs, *Modal Verbs* and *Auxiliary Verbs*. Modals and Auxiliaries are “function words.”

*A Basic Sight Vocabulary of 220 Word, Comprising All Words, Except Nouns Common to the Word List of International Kindergarten Union, The Gates List, and Wheeler Howell List*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Edward W. Dolch, “A Basic Sight Vocabulary,” *The Elementary School Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 6 (February, 1936), pp. 456-60.



### III. The Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary: Grade Level in Order of Frequency

**Pre-Primer:** the to and a I you it in said for up look is go we little down can see not one my me big come blue red where jump away here help make yellow two play run find three funny

**Primer:** he was that she on they but at with all there out be have am do did what so get like this will yes went are now no came ride into good want too pretty four saw well ran brown eat who new must black white soon our ate say under please

**First Grade:** of his had him her some as then could when where them ask an over just from any how know put take every old by after think let going walk again may stop fly round give once open has live thank

**Second Grade:** would very your its around don't right green their call sleep five wash or before been off cold tell work first does goes write always made gave us buy those use fast pull both sit which read why found because best upon these sing wish many

**Third Grade:** if long about six never got seven eight today myself much keep try start ten bring drink only better hold warm full done light pick hurt cut kind fall carry small own show hot far draw clean grow together shall laugh

#### Dolch Nouns (95 words)

apple, baby, back, ball, bear, bed, bell, bird, birthday, boat, box, boy, bread, brother, cake, car, cat, chair, chicken, children, Christmas, coat, corn, cow, day, dog, doll, door, duck, egg, eye, farm, farmer, father, feet, fire, fish, floor, flower, game, garden, girl, good-bye, grass, ground, hand, head, hill, home, horse, house, kitty, leg, letter, man, men, milk, money, morning, mother, name, nest, night, paper, party, picture, pig, rabbit, rain, ring, robin, Santa Claus, school, seed, sheep, shoe, sister, snow, song, squirrel, stick, street, sun, table, thing, time, top, toy, tree, watch, water, way, wind, window, wood

The Dolch Nouns are included in this study for convenience. They rarely, as far as I know, enter into discussions about sight-words. Most discussion centers on the 220 Service Words.

#### **IV. Dangers of teaching sight words (whole words) first without Phonics: Illustrated and Explained.**

The following information was taken from Raymond Laurita's foundational article: "Basic Sight Vocabulary: A Help or a Hindrance." (Spelling Progress Bulletin, Summer, 1966).

Raymond Laurita asks, "What is the difference between **was, saw, can, sun** or **is, it, an, on, no, me, we**, to a child who isn't cognizant of the nuances of the letters composing the language and who is responding primarily to word configuration?" Laurita correctly predicts, "Confused visual response patterning caused by the introduction of whole words before the child is prepared to respond with a consistent, serial method of apprehension."

Table I

This table contains words selected from the Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary List which have configurational similarity and have the potential to contribute to the development of visual response patterning which is unreliable and confusing.

is-in-on-on-an-or	come-came-can
at-to-it-if-of-off	is-as-am-a-any
we-me-my-may-many	do-does-goes-go
be-by-buy-big	give-gave-get
he-her-here-where-were	not-no-on-now
were-went-want-when-then	full-fall-fell
in-an-are-any-many	but-put-pull-push
call-cold-could-would	be-he-the-we
they-then-them-there-their	live-like
well-will-with-which-wish	or-are-of-on
new-now-how-who-own-no	then-when
you-your-our-or	up-us-use
there-where-were	so-soon
these-those-this-that	for-from-of

Table II

This table contains words taken from the Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary List which are particularly susceptible to reversal because of their structure.

red-are	eat-ate	him-my	never-ever	own-now	you-not
at-to	far-ran	his-so	no-on	to-into	may-am
as-go	for-from	if-for	not-to	was-saw	in-on
big-go	got-to	let-tell	now-who	wash-shall	it-at
both-those	he-the	out-o	of-for	we-me	its-so
don't-not	help-play	my-arm	one-no	where-write	just-start
where-here	with-that	you-they	how-who		

“The number of words of similar configuration is immediately apparent. Once a child experiences difficulty and has only configuration to rely on as a tool of attack, he becomes heir to all the errors of generations of disabled readers... Confusing words of similar configuration is a fault more or less common to all reading disabilities. It is likewise apparent in many normally proficient readers and possibly acts as an inhibitory factor in full reading comprehension. ...Once confused perceptual pattern becomes established, it becomes the child's habitual response pattern for printed symbols unless replaced by a different approach. Attempts at instruction in the basic sight words without simultaneous instruction in word and letter recognition are generally unsuccessful for remedial students.”

**Note from Don Potter:** Laurita's work on the psychology of teaching sight-words is one of the first, and one of the best studies of the subject ever done. I have published several essays by Mr. Laurita on my website, [www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net)

**Fundamental Premise:** When you teach a sound-association system (alphabet system) as if it were a sight-association system (hieroglyphic system), you create associational confusion (reading disability).

## Diane McGuinness on Sight Words

“Sight words were originally defined as words which such irregular spellings that they had to be memorized “by sight.” Later memorizing *all* words by sight became the major mode of learning to read, especially “look-say.” Phonics programs and most reading textbooks also advocate teaching a large group of “sight words.” Here, the rational shifts to the “getting started” theory. Children should learn sight words, it is claimed, because they can start reading “right away,” and this is motivating. Thus, sight words are taught prior to learning the alphabet code or concurrently with learning the code. *Teaching sight words this way can have profoundly negative consequences on the child’s fragile understanding of the alphabet principle.*” (*Why Our Children Can’t Read*, McGuinness, 268)

“Teachers all over the world teach “sight words” based on lists like this one. This is very scary, because if authors of textbooks don’t know the code, then teachers can’t learn the code, and if teachers don’t know the code, then the children can’t learn the code. If children can’t learn the code, the child can’t learn to read or spell.” (*Why Our Children Can’t Read*, McGuinness, 262f)

“Most reading programs produced by major publishing houses include a large list of sight words, many using “regular” spellings. It is a bad idea to teach sight words to children learning *any* language system. But there is more at stake. Teaching whole words by sight promotes a faulty decoding strategy. This happens because memorizing whole words seems logical and is relatively easy initially, leading to a false sense of security. But a whole-word strategy will inevitably collapse, depending on the child’s vocabulary and visual-memory skills. Meanwhile, this strategy can harden into a habit that can be difficult to break.” (Diane McGuinness, *Early Reading Instruction*, 57, 58).

“On the other hand we know that time spent memorizing sight words can cause a negative outcome by promoting a strategy of “whole word guessing.” This is where children decode the first letter phonemically and guess the rest of the word based on its length and shape. This strategy is highly predictive of reading failure. It is well known that programs that emphasize (sight word, context-based guessing, part-word analysis, phonemic decoding) strongly affect the child’s decoding strategy, and that this strategy quickly becomes entrenched.” (Diane McGuinness, *Early Reading Instruction*, 114, 115)

“Boronat and Logan (1997) showed convincingly that what you pay attention to is automatically encoded by the brain and automatically cued in memory. As they put it, “What one pays attention to acts as a retrieval cue that draws associations out of memory.” what you ignore, even though it is physically adjacent to what you are looking at, is not encoded at all. The more a child focuses on the wrong patterns and combinations of letter sequences in words, the more automatic (habitual) it becomes.” (Diane McGuinness, *Early Reading Instruction*, 115)

In the Observational studies, time spent memorizing sight words was negatively and weakly correlated with reading scores for the kindergartners, but was negatively and strongly correlated for the older children (6 to 8 years). A sight-word strategy begins to overload between 7 and 8 years. I found that children who adopt a whole-word strategy by the end of first grade had not improved their performance when they were followed up in third grade. These children often made the same decoding errors in the same words that they had made two years earlier, and they were uniformly the worst readers in the class. (Diane McGuinness, *Early Reading Instruction*, 115)

In chapter 12, McGuinness deals with a recent theory that children learn to read in stages, the last of which is the “late-stage” sight-word reading. She gives convincing information that this is not correct. Her research indicates that Cattell’s reaction-time research was flawed because it did not take into consideration Parallel Distributed Processing and the fact that reaction-time studies are not precise enough to make inference of mental processes feasible. I suggest a careful study of her valuable discussion here. I was confused for quite some time by Shawitz and Ehri’s puzzling claims that all words eventually become “sight-words.” This has confused a lot of people.

### **Stanisals Dehaene: Cutting Edge Research**

Stanisals Dehaene represents cutting-edge, cognitive research into reading when he recently wrote, “In summary, there is no longer any reason to doubt that global contours of words play virtually no role in reading. We do not recognize a printed word through a holistic grasp of its contour, but because our brain breaks it down into letters and graphemes. This fast and parallel processing probably explains why well-known and respected psychologists once propounded theories of global or “syncretic” reading. Today, we know that the immediacy of reading is just an illusion engendered by the extreme automaticity of its component stages, which operate outside our conscious awareness.” (*Reading in the Brain*, p. 225f.)

### **Observations on Sight Words** From Wiley Blevins, *Phonics from A to Z*, Scholastic, NY, 1998. p. 97

Only 13 words (**a, and, for, he is, in, it, of, that, the, to, was, you**) account for more than 25% of the words in print. Although the Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary was generated more than 40 years ago (1936), these words account for more than 50% of the words found in textbooks today (Johns, 1980).

Knowledge of high-frequency words is necessary for fluent reading. Although many high-frequency words carry little meaning, they affect the flow and coherence of text. Many of these words are considered “irregular” because they stray from the commonly taught sound-spelling relationships. Research shows that readers store these “irregular” words (Gough and Walsh, 1991; Treiman and Baron, 1981; Lovett, 1987) in their lexical memory the same way they store so-called regular words. That is, readers have to pay attention to each letter and the pattern of letters in a word and associate these with the sounds they represent (Ehri, 1992) Therefore, instruction should focus attention on each letter and/or letter pattern.

However, children don’t learn “irregular” words as easily or as quickly as they do “regular” words. Early readers commonly confuse the high-frequency words *of*, *for*, and *from*; the reversible words *on/no* and *was/saw*; and words with *th* and *w* such as *there*, *them*, *what*, *were*, *their*, *then*, *what*, *where*, *this*, *these*, *went*, *will*, *that*, *this*, *when*, and *with* (Cunningham, 1995). Therefore, children need to be taught irregular words with explicit instruction.

**Observation on Blevins:** The designation of words as regular and irregular is relative, rather than absolute. There are several popular lists of sight words, and no two lists are alike. The degree of irregularity depends on the phonetic system being used for comparison. Don Potter

## Geraldine Rodgers on the High Frequency Word Effect

Nevertheless, very few high-frequency words do account for so very much of running text: about 300 covering 75%, 1,000 covering 90%, and 3,000 to 9,000 covering 98%. The rest of those half million words in English only turn up in the remaining 2% of running text. Yet, even with such enormously limited ability as the recognition of only 300 or so of the commonest words, it is possible to read at least 75% of most texts. If such a “crippled reader” is intelligent, perhaps 90% of such texts can be read accurately by context-guessing from the initial consonant sounds of the unknown words (phony phonics in action!), and 90% accuracy is above frustration level. (75)

The high-frequency-word effect, which is the fact that the greatest part of any selection is expressed by a very small number of words, is the thing that made the deaf-mute method possible in the first place. The deaf-mute-method could never have been possible except for that high-frequency-word effect. (75)

Yet the lowest-frequency words are the kernels of real thought, even though they compose only about two per-cent of almost any running page of print. It is only those lowest-frequency words that all but the simplest thoughts are transferred. Since functional illiterates lack the ability to sound out those low-frequency words and therefore to learn them, they are reported to have appallingly low “reading comprehension.” What they really suffer from, of course, is not low “reading comprehension” but true illiteracy, since the term illiteracy really means the inability to derive spoken language from printed letters. Therefore the term, “functional illiteracy” is simply a pompous mask fashioned to hide what is really true illiteracy. (77)

These quotes are from *The Hidden Story*. I believe the high-frequency word effect explains how that children who learn to read from the meaning of the words instead of the sounds of the letters are inaccurate guessers, but readers, nevertheless, who often can do amazing feats of answering comprehension questions in the face of more than a sprinkling of misread words.

Miss Rodgers quotes Dr. Hilda Mosse as saying, “Reading disorders can be caused by an inability to form the necessary conditioned reflexes or by establishing and practicing the wrong reflexes.” Miss Rogers continues, “Experienced and dedicated teachers who limit oral reading of their children to reading groups, using basal readers with their controlled vocabularies, and who then limit their reading tests to silent reading comprehension tests are often completely unaware of the reading disabilities right in their own classrooms. It is asking too much of human nature to ask such teachers who have been using these sight-word basal readers for years, with the honest conviction that they were teaching little children to read, to recognize that they have been doing something wrong all their professional lives. But such teachers are assured by something called ‘reading levels’, by which a child is supposed to know successively his handful of first-grade words and then a few more second-grade words and then third-grade words, ad nauseum, and his reading books only use the few words he has learned. The reality is that outside the never-never land of ‘reading experts’ who invented ‘controlled vocabularies’, there is no such thing as a third-grade word, as a simple reading of the Mother Goose rhymes demonstrates.” (*The Case for the Prosecution*)

*The Miller Word Identification Assessment* is the best way to determine if a student is an Objective or Subjective Reader. It is available at [www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net) and [www.blendphonics.net](http://www.blendphonics.net).

## Stephen Parker on Sight Words

The following is taken from Stephen Parker's fine discussion in his 2017 excellent book, *Reading Instruction and Phonics* (28f).

The last vocabulary term I'll cover here is sight word. This will take more effort to explain than the previous terms because it is a much-misunderstood concept. A sight word is one that a reader instantly and automatically identifies without conscious effort. She doesn't analyze it, decode it, or sound it out. Rather, as soon as she sees the word, its sound and meaning are immediately available to her. If, instead, she first hears the word, its spelling and meaning are immediately available; and if she first thinks it, spelling and sound follow just as rapidly. For mature readers, most words are sight words.

Our brains, however, can store two distinctly different types of sight words – I'll call them **Type 1** and **Type 2**.

We create a **Type 1** sight word by linking the overall visual appearance (or shape) of the word directly to its meaning, without regard to the sound value of the letters that compose it. Examples are CHAIR, \$, %, and 24. There is no possibility of "sounding out" any of these symbolic representations of sound. Yet, as soon as we see them, what we "hear" in our brains is: KWIRE, DOLLAR, PERCENT, and TWENTY-FOUR.

We create a **Type 2** sight word by deliberate sound analysis: segmenting a written word into its individual graphemes, linking those graphemes with corresponding phonemes, and then blending those phonemes together to recognize the word.

The creation of a **Type 1** sight word depends upon the rather arduous process of rote memorization. The creation of a **Type 2** sight word depends upon successfully decoding that word, on the grapheme-phoneme level, 3-5 times, after which it becomes a sight word automatically.

As an example, consider the case of two hypothetical beginners, Danny and Tana, each trying to read what is for them a new word: SHEEP.

Danny has not been taught the sound value of letters. Nonetheless, the teacher says s-h-e-e-p means SHEEP, so Danny takes the teacher's word. He consciously attempts to commit the five letters to memory. Since he has not been taught any phoneme-grapheme correspondences, one letter is as good as another. For Danny, there's no reason that SHEEP couldn't be spelled "c-d-a-a-k" or "x-e-q-q-m." This, I think you'll agree, is a tedious way to memorize things; it's akin to memorizing phone numbers or passwords. Clearly it can be done, but how many words is a child capable of learning and remembering in such a manner? For Danny, SHEEP is stored in his brain as a **Type 1** sight word.

Tana, who is learning Synthetic Phonics, has an enormous advantage over Danny. She analyzes the unknown word, SHEEP, and accurately segments it into its 3 graphemes: SH, EE, and P. Then, using her knowledge of the code, she matches each of these graphemes with a corresponding phoneme: /sh/, /ē/, and /p/. Finally, blending the 3 phonemes together, she recognizes the resulting word: a fluffy animal that provides us with wool. After she decodes the word just a few more times, SHEEP automatically becomes a sight word for Tana, *without her ever deliberately trying to memorize it*. The word becomes part of a personal lexicon in Tana's brain reserved for words whose sound, meaning, and now spelling, are fully and accurately fused, and bonded as a unit. Because this word has been segmented *down to its phonemic level*, with all phonemes and graphemes correctly matched, it is *automatically* handled by the brain's powerful Language Center. For Tana, SHEEP is stored in her brain as a **Type 2 sight word**, fully connected to sound.

We can master 50,000 sight words because nearly all of them are **Type 2** sight words: words that have been explicitly analyzed *at the grapheme-phoneme level*, with all graphemes and phonemes appropriately matched. This is precisely what distinguishes **Type 2** from **Type 1** sight words. If we were in Danny's predicament, we would be stuck in functionally illiteracy with, at best a thousand sight words. The fact that we know 50,000 sight words means that we acquired most of them by deliberate phonetic analysis, as exemplified by Tana. The misunderstanding of sight word formation – specifically the difference between **Type 1** and **Type 2** sight words – predates whole languages, and continues in balanced literacy today. (58, 60) (Pace Linnea C. Ehri in Internet Resource Page of this document.)

## Dolch Sight-Words Taught Phonetically in Hazel Loring's *Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for First Grade*

(Countering the false claims that Dolch Sight-Words are so irregular  
that they have to be taught with whole-word memorization)

a	U35	call	U33	gave	U14	keep	U22	only	--	sleep	U21	very	--
about	U35	came	U14	get	U5	kind	U15	open	U45	small	U33		
after	U20	can	U1	give	--	know	U40	or	U19	so	U16	walk	U40
again	--	carry	--	go	U16			our	U28	some	--	want	U10
all	U35	clean	U23	goes	U26	laugh	U39	out	U28	soon	U30	warm	U18
always	U33	cold	U15	going	U29	let	U5	over	U45	start	U13	was	U10
am	U1	come	--	good	U31	light	U39	own	U27	stop	U13	wash	U10
an	U1	could	--	got	U3	like	U14					we	U16
and	U6	cut	U4	green	U22	little	U43	pick	U6	take	U14	well	U5
any	--			grow	U27	live	U14	play	U21	tell	U5	went	U6
are	--	did	U2			long	U11	please	U41	ten	U5	were	--
around	U35	do	--	had	U1	look	U31	pretty	U25	thank	U8	what	U10
as	U41	does	--	has	U41			pull	U36	that	U8	when	U10
ask	U6	done	--	have	--	made	U14	put	U36	the	U16	where	--
at	U1	don't	--	he	U16	make	U14			their	--	which	U10
ate	U14	dawn	U32	help	U6	many	--	ran	U1	them	U8	white	U14
<i>away</i>	<i>U21</i>	draw	U32	her	U20	may	U21	read	U23	then	U8	who	--
		drink	U17	here	U14	me	U16	red	U5	there	--	why	U25
be	U16			him	U2	much	U9	ride	U14	these	U14	will	U2
because	U41	eat	U23	his	U41	must	U7	right	U39	they	--	wish	U7
been	--	eight	--	hold	U15	my	U25	round	U35	think	U8	with	U8
before	U19	every	--	hot	U3	myself	U25	run	U4	this	U8	work	U20
best	U6			how	U27					those	U14	would	--
better	U20	fall	U33	hurt	U20	never	U20	said	--	three	U22	write	U40
big	U2	far	U18			new	U34	saw	U32	to	--		
black	U13	fast	U6	I	U16	no	U16	say	U21	today	--	yellow	U27
blue	U34	find	U15	if	U2	not	U3	see	U22	together	--	yes	U5
both	U15	first	U22	in	U2	now	U27	<i>seven</i>	<i>U17</i>	too	U30	you	U28
bring	U17	five	U14	into	--			shall	U7	try	U25	your	--
brown	U27	fly	U25	is	U42	of	--	she	U16	two	--		
but	U4	for	U19	it	U5	off	U3	show	U27				
buy	--	found	U28	its	U6	old	U15	sing	U11	under	U20		
by	U25	four	U28			on	U3	sit	U2	up	U4		
		from	--	jump	U6	once	--	six	U2	<i>upon</i>	<i>U13</i>		
		full	U5	just	U6	one	--			us	U4		
		funny	U25							use	U41		

These 220 words make up from 50% to 75% of all ordinary reading-matter. U = Blend Phonics Unit. The three words in *italics* (away, seven, upon) are not in *Reading Made Easy With Blend Phonics for First Grade*, but they are in Mr. Potter's *Blend Phonics Reader: Standard Edition*.



Only 39 of the 220 Dolch List Words are absent from  
*Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for First Grade*

again any are **away** been buy carry come could do does done don't eight every give have into many of once one only said **seven** some their they to today together two **upon** very were where who would your

**Note:** "Of" is the only word that can be considered completely irregular; the others are only slightly irregular. Live is regular, but with live the e is there because of the v, which cannot end a word.

**Here is a useful classification of the omissions:**

**3 Regular words:** *away, seven, upon* (Included in *Blend Phonics Reader*.)

**36 Semi-Irregular words:** *again any are been buy carry come could do does done don't eight very give have into many of once one only said some their they to today together two very were where who would your*

o=Long oo	o=Short ū	ai=Short ě	ou=Short oo	a=Short ĭ
do	come	again	would	any
to	done	said	could	many
today	does			
together	some			
two	one			
who	once			
into	of			

*Have* has a short *ă* before a single consonant, *e* is there because a word cannot end in *v* (In this case the final *e* is not a long vowel marker). *Give* is similar to *have* in that the *i* is short before *ă* single consonant and the *e* is there because the word cannot end with *v*. *Are* is regular except for the silent *e*. In *carry* the *a* before the double *r* is long, this is a rather common pattern, *marry* is good example. In *eight* the *igh* in a long *ā* is a common pattern as in *weight, freight*, etc. *Were* is regular except for the silent *e*. In *very* the *r* goes with the *y* and not the *e*, the *e* being short. In *every* the first *e* is short and the second is not sounded. *Buy* has a unsounded *u* to distinguish it from the preposition *by*. *Been* is pronounced with a single short *ī* in the United States. The long *ā* pronunciation of *ei* and *ey* in *their* and *they* are simply alternative spellings. I believe the *o* in *don't* is long because of the double consonant *n't*. The *o* of *of* is the schwa sound and the *f* is pronounced as *v*, which is a simple voicing of the consonant. The *o* in *only* is a long *ō*, I am not sure why. In my dialect *where* is pronounced /hwēr/, but across America it is subject to considerable variation in pronunciation. *Your* is pronounced a couple different ways, I use the short *oo*; but children find it easy to identify just from the sounds of the *y-r*.

The previous two pages are inserted as undeniable evidence that there is no good reason for teaching any sight-words with whole word memorization before starting phonics instruction in the light of the plain fact that most so-called sight-words are entirely regular, and the few that are not perfectly regular are regular enough not to cause students who have good decoding skills any problem. The only words that is completely irregular is *of*. Even it is simply a slight shift of *o* to schwa and the unvoicing of the *f*, hardly sufficient justification for current practice of teaching sight-words first.

I highly recommend Hazel Loring's 1980 *Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for First Grade* as a fine example of a phonics-first program that will produce **Objective Readers**, reading accurately and with high comprehension from the sounds represented by the print.

The chart that follows is in the form of a ladder of skills beginning at the bottom of the page. There are six clearly delineated Steps to the program that lead to high level reading achievement. This is only the beginning of reading instruction and not the end. But, as the first steps are the most important, it represents a solid foundation for all future work in reading instruction.

Mrs. Loring informs us that she was able to complete the program in approximately four months at the beginning of first-grade. I teach the program with cursive handwriting, making it "multi-sensory" in the full Orton-Gillingham usage of the term. Each student receives a wide-lined spiral the first day of instruction. Letter formation, letter sounds (or more properly the sounds represented by the letters), sound blending, and word meaning are all taught simultaneously in as little as four short months at the beginning of first grade.

I am careful to have the students create their own sentences to make sure that they the words are properly processed and stored away in the memory for meaning getting during reading. For any words the students may not know, I create the sentences for them. This is a joyful way to teach reading because it engages the students in the learning process and assures them of instant success.

Although my associate, Elizabeth Brown, has prepared a delightful set of decodable readers to go with the program, Loring tells us that she was able to teach the program using whatever readers were in adoption with her district, sight-word or linguistically decodable. I have had the same satisfactory experience.

*Blend Phonics* is especially good for whole-language classrooms that are not allergic to sequential skills instruction. In four short months, the students will be able to read leveled readers far above their level.

## Blend Phonics Reader Skills Ladder

Step	Unit	Association	# of Words
<b>Step 6</b> Advanced Spellings Open Syllables 37 Dolch Words	47	37 Dolch List words and 3 /zh/ words	40
	46	Long Vowels in Open syllables	73
	45	ed with short e; ed sounds like 'd; ed sounds like 't	37
	44	Final le, tion, sion	33
	43	ph sounds like f	12
	42	se sounds like z	22
	41	Silent k, w, t, b, l, and h	41
	40	Silent gh (igh, ough/augh), and gh like f	24
	39	Soft sound of g in dge & sometimes before e, i, y.	40
	38	Soft sound of c (before e, i, & y); s like sh (sugar)	50
	37	Phonograms: ul, ull, ush (u sound like short oo)	10
	36	Unaccented a at beginning of words & a	16
<b>Step 5</b> Vowel Digraphs & Diphthongs	35	Diagrams ew, ue	23
	34	Phonograms: al, all	15
	33	Vowel Digraphs aw, au	21
	32	Short sound of oo	24
	31	Long sound of oo	42
	30	Diphthong: oy, oi	18
	29	Diphthong ou; Digraph ōu, often Irregular	19
	28	Digraph: ōw, Diphthong: ow	44
	27	Vowel Digraph: oa, oe (like long ō)	24
	26	Final Vowel y (ē); Long ī in single syllable words	38
	25	Vowel Digraph ie (long ī and long ē)	24
	24	Vowel Digraph ea (long ē, short ě, long ā)	44
23	Vowel Digraph: ee	41	
22	Vowel Digraph: ai, ay	35	
<b>Step 4</b> R-Contr. Vowels	21	Phonogram er, ir, ur, and sometimes or	52
	20	Phonogram: or	20
	19	Phonogram: ar	23
<b>Step 3</b> Long Vowels (VCE)	18	Short words ending in long vowels: be, go, he, me, etc.	9
	17	Phonograms - Long Vowels: old, olt, oll, ost,, oth, ild, ind	32
	16	VCE (long vowels)	166
<b>Step 2</b> Consonant Blends & Digraphs & Compound Words	15	Short Vowel Compound Words	48
	14	Initial Consonant Blends: br, cr, dr, fr, gr, pr, tr	56
	13	Initial Consonant Blends: bl, cl, fl, gl, pl, sc, sk, sm, sl, sn, sp, st, sw	92
	12	nk (ank, ink, onk, unk)	16
	11	ng (ang, ing, ong, ung)	20
	10	Consonant Digraph: wh	12
	9	Consonant Digraphs: ch, tch (ch = k)	21
	8	Consonant Digraphs: th (voiced); th (unvoiced)	12
	7	Consonant Digraph: sh	12
6	Final Consonant Blends	63	
<b>Step 1</b> Short Vowels & Consonants	5	Short vowel ě	33
	4	Short vowel ŭ	36
	3	Short vowel ō	40
	2	Short vowel ĭ	55
	1	Short vowel ă b c d f g h j k l m n p q r s t v w y z ck	47

There are 1,974 words in the program.

## Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

June 6, 2012, Odessa, TX

Ever since reading Eldon E. Ekwall and James L. Shanker's *Diagnosis and Remediation of the Disabled Reader*, 3rd Edition several years ago, I have wanted to publish a paper comparing their "Scope and Sequence" with Hazel Loring's "Scope and Sequence."

I saw immediately that there was a vast difference between the two, and I felt sure that the difference made a huge difference in students' levels of reading achievement.

Let me say that there is a lot of excellent information in Ekwall & Shanker's book. They have some very fine assessment material. But in following the standard practice of considering sight-words, configuration clues, and context clues as a major part of beginning reading instruction, they take, I believe, the wrong path: a path fraught with negative consequences for beginning reading instruction, diagnosis of reading problems, and the prescription for remedial measures.

The authors discuss "Competencies that Student Should Achieve in Their Progression Through the Grades." It is to be noted that students are expected to know half the Dolch List 220 Sight Words by the middle of second-grade and the remaining 110 words by the middle of third grade. I recall being surprised by Edward Fry's statement that it takes about three years for a student to learn the first 300 of his Instant Words. Compare these dismally low projection with the competencies of a *Blend Phonics* student who will have been taught to decode all but 37 of the 220 Dolch List words by the middle of first-grade. Even that small remnant of sight-words is amenable to identification by decoding with only a slight prompt from the teacher or the assistance of the context. The most recent revision of *Blend Phonics* included all 220 Dolch List words so there is absolutely no need to teach any of them with whole word memorization.

Professor William McMahon stated my position perfectly way back in 1965,

My point is this: The fact of the matter is that the child who is suffering from "severe reading disability" has not failed to learn. On the contrary, he has learned exactly what he has been taught and he has become a reading cripple as a consequence." He called this guessing habit, the "McMahon Syndrome."

The outcome of accepting the Phonics-First Framework in the area of diagnosis and remediation would be to follow Rudolf Flesch's, largely unheeded 1955 recommendation "to isolate students from their whole-word guessing environment and doing only phonics exercises until the guessing habit was largely cured." This is my recommendation and practice.

[www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net)

[www.blendphonics.org](http://www.blendphonics.org)

This document was last updated on September 7, 2012, September 18, 2015, Feb. 16, 2016, and Feb. 7, 2017, July 21, 2017. Information on the two types of sight words from Stephen Parker were added on June 30, 2018.

# Rudolf Flesch's Penetrating Insights Into the Perverse Psychology of the Whole Word Method

"The word method is one of the purest forms  
of conditioned reflex psychology  
that has ever been invented."

Rudolf Flesch - 1955

I wish educators were frank about this thing and admitted that the word method is a simple application of the conditioned reflex. It goes straight back to Pavlov and his famous salivating dogs. You remember what Pavlov did, don't you? He rang a bell whenever he put meat in front of the dog. The dog salivated whenever he saw meat. So he got used to salivating whenever he heard a bell. Whereupon Pavlov played his dirty trick on the poor animal and rang the bell *without* giving him any meat. And the dog salivated in vain. Pavlov had given him a useless unnatural, totally meaningless conditioned reflex.

It was not long before the conditioned-reflex psychologists - the "associationists" or "connectionist" school - found out that Pavlov's discovery could be used to train human beings. Expose him repeatedly to an association of certain things or events, and sooner or later he will automatically connect them in his mind. *Of course* you can teach a child to read that way - nothing easier than that. You show him the word *chicken* seventeen times in succession, each time in connection with a picture of a chicken and an explanation by the teacher that this combination of letters means a chicken. And so with every other word.

Don't you see how degrading this whole process is? The child is never told *why* this heap of letters means "chicken," and not "giraffe," or "kangaroo," or "recess period." Don't you know the main question in all children's minds is the question *why*? Maybe the child would like to know *why chicken* means a chicken, maybe he doesn't ask the question simply because he feels he won't get an answer. It's "chicken" because Teacher says so. Conditioning is an authoritarian process.

It seems to me a plain fact that the word method consists essentially of treating children as if they were dogs. It is not a method of teaching at all; it is clearly a method of animal training. It's the most inhuman, mean, stupid way of fostering something on a child's mind. ... conditioned-reflexers are authoritarians.

*Why Johnny Can't Read and what you can do about it.* Rudolf Flesch (1955), pages 125f.

## Links to Research Documents

Raymond E. Laurita

[http://donpotter.net/pdf/laurita\\_critical\\_exam.pdf](http://donpotter.net/pdf/laurita_critical_exam.pdf)

<http://donpotter.net/pdf/laurita-basic-sight-vocabul.pdf>

<http://donpotter.net/pdf/laurita-basic-sight-vocabul.pdf>

<http://donpotter.net/pdf/errors-children-make-laurit.pdf>

Samuel L. Blumenfeld

<http://donpotter.net/pdf/miller-blumenfeld-dyslexia-.pdf>

<http://www.donpotter.net/pdf/miscue-analysis.pdf>

<http://www.donpotter.net/pdf/dyslexia-school-disease.pdf>

[http://donpotter.net/pdf/creating\\_dyslexia\\_blumenfel.pdf](http://donpotter.net/pdf/creating_dyslexia_blumenfel.pdf)

<http://www.donpotter.net/pdf/new-illiterates-quotes.pdf>

Helen R. Lowe

<http://donpotter.net/pdf/lowe-word-guessing-fallacy.pdf>

<http://donpotter.net/pdf/solomon-or-salami.pdf>

Dr. Patrick Groff

[http://donpotter.net/pdf/groff\\_sight\\_words\\_1975.pdf](http://donpotter.net/pdf/groff_sight_words_1975.pdf)

<http://donpotter.net/pdf/myths-of-reading-instructio.pdf>

Prof. William C. McMahon

[http://donpotter.net/pdf/mchahon\\_syndrome.pdf](http://donpotter.net/pdf/mchahon_syndrome.pdf)

Louisa Moats

[http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2007/200701\\_wholelanguagehijinks/Moats2007.pdf](http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2007/200701_wholelanguagehijinks/Moats2007.pdf)

<http://www.ldonline.org/article/6394/>

Charlie M. Richardson

<http://donpotter.net/pdf/richardson-shaywitz.pdf>

<http://donpotter.net/pdf/reading-charlie-richardson.pdf>

Geraldine Rodgers

<http://donpotter.net/pdf/hidden-story-quotations.pdf>

Donald Potter

[http://donpotter.net/pdf/dangers\\_of\\_sight\\_words.pdf](http://donpotter.net/pdf/dangers_of_sight_words.pdf)

Readsters Website

<http://www.readsters.com/wp-content/uploads/ComparingDolchAndFryLists.pdf>

Stephen Parker: *Reading Instruction and Phonics: Theory and Practice for Teachers*

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SCwioYLFnU2KgPL4gBoybA\\_7fDp41\\_LJ/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SCwioYLFnU2KgPL4gBoybA_7fDp41_LJ/view)

<https://amzn.to/2yYizzl>

Linnea C. Ehri: *Research on Learning to Read and Spell: A Personal-Historical Perspective* (1997)

<http://www.riggsinst.org/Ehri.asp>

Linnea C. Ehri: "Development of Sight Word Reading; Phases and Findings" (2004). I had trouble at first understanding Ehri until I came to understand that her scholarly use of the term "sight word" was completely different from the popular use of the term among educators.

<http://www.pitt.edu/~perfetti/PDF/Ehri.pdf>

John R. Beech: Ehri's model of phases of learning to read: a brief critique (2005)

<http://d11literacy.pbworks.com/f/beeceh.pdf>

E. W. Dolch: A Basic Sight Vocabulary (*The Elementary School Journal*, Feb. 1936)

<http://twuread5503.pbworks.com/f/a%2Bbasic%2Bsight%2Bvocabulary.pdf>